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SHOPPERS DRUG MART
SEE WHAT'S NEW... CHECK OUT OUR LATEST OFFER ON PAGE 53

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BALLERINA PUSHED TO HER DEATH, COURT RULES

GTA WOMAN KILLED BY LOVER AFTER DECIDING TO LEAVE AUSTRALIA PAGE 36

Woman dies after allegedly missed tumour

Torontonian succumbs to cancer just after filing a lawsuit against hospital and radiologist PAGE 4

Temp gets all philosophical

In which Shannon muses on bubble economies and the death of the middle class PAGE 38

Guitars that look as lovely as they sound

Jaw-dropping axes shown off in new book 108 Rock Star Guitars liable to make you weep 96 tears PAGE 50

NEWS WORTH SHARING.

Cops target vast crime ring over welfare fraud

Three arrests. Police say trio used refugees to open bank accounts for their stolen cheques

Three Toronto residents were arrested Tuesday in connection with a crime ring that police say ripped off banks and the government with stolen cheques and welfare fraud to the tune of millions.

The operation is one of several in the Toronto area, according to Sgt. Vance Morgan of the RCMP's GTA Financial Crime Unit.

"In 2012, this type of fraud has taken over $50 million," Morgan said. "That would be a cumulative of all cells conducting this type of fraud."

The three accused, who Morgan said are Hungarian nationals, are Jeno Lakatos, 40, Jozsef Virag, 25, and Nikoletta Arghandewal, 38. Arghandewal also went by the pseudonym surnames Varga, Bozyel and Stokes.

All three face charges of fraud over $5,000, possession of fake identification and possession of property obtained by crime and conspiracy.

Police say the three recruited accomplices to come to Canada, who arrived in the country as refugees. Before they were deported back to Hungary, the accomplices opened bank accounts in Canada.

After they had left the country, these bank accounts were taken over by the accused, who used the accounts to deposit stolen cheques, Morgan said.

Missing cash

"We have not seized any profits or anything like that as yet. If we find it, we will seize it."

Sgt. Vance Morgan of the RCMP's GTA Financial Crime Unit

Toll

$50M

According to the RCMP, this type of fraud raked in over $50 million in 2012.

"The individual who opened the account was no longer in the country," Morgan said. "They opened it, now they've departed the country. Others were using the account for fraudulent activity."

Police say the accused also collected social-assistance payments through fraudulent means.

Morgan said he could not go into detail because the investigation is ongoing and more arrests could be made.

"There are more parties to the offence, that we believe," Morgan said.

Morgan said police do not know exactly how many similar operations exist, but there have been past investigations in Hamilton and Durham and Peel regions.

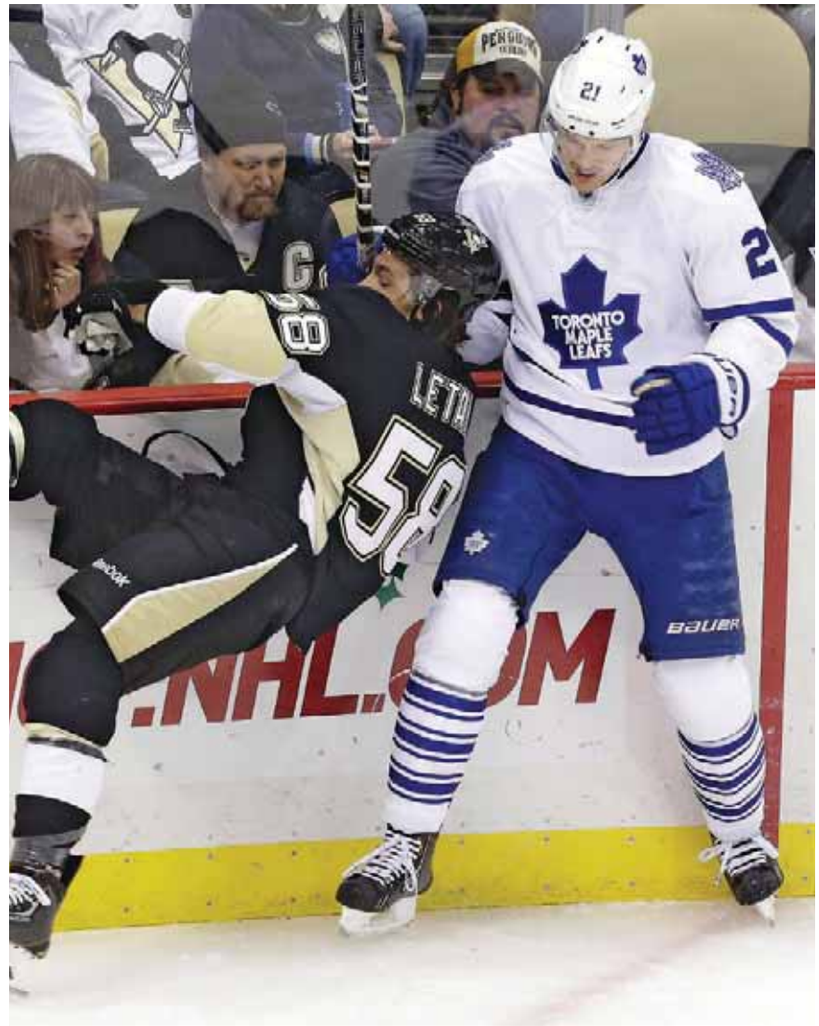
Along with the three arrests on Tuesday, police searched two Toronto residences and a vehicle.

The three accused were scheduled to appear in court for a bail hearing in Toronto on Wednesday.

The RCMP started investigating a year ago after a joint complaint from Canada's five major banks. Morgan said the police have not recovered any of the stolen money.

"We have not seized any profits or anything like that as yet," Morgan said. "If we find it, we will seize it."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE



ROUGH AND TUMBLE

The Leafs' James van Riemsdyk collides with Pittsburgh Penguins' Kris Letang in a hard-fought game in Pittsburgh on Wednesday. Head to metronews.ca for the full story or page 81 for an interview with superstar Sydney Crosby. GENE J. PUSKAR/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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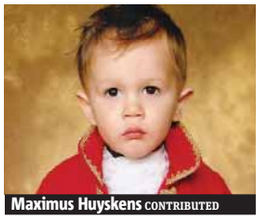
Left in car. Woman pleads guilty in death of grandson



Maximus Huyskens CONTRIBUTED

A woman in Milton, Ont., has been convicted of failing to provide the necessities of life after her grandson died because she forgot him in a sweltering car this summer.

Court records show that Leslie MacDonald, 52, pleaded guilty to the crime earlier this month and the judge accepted a recommendation from both the Crown and defence for a suspended sentence plus two years of probation.

In an agreed statement of facts, she admitted that on June 26 she was supposed to take Maximus Huyskens, almost two, to daycare. But after picking him up, buckling him in and driving away, she says she mistakenly drove to her own house, thinking she had already dropped him off.

Around 5 p.m. she says she went to pick up Maximus, but was told he never arrived, and it was only when she went back to her car that she discovered her grandson, dead in the back seat.

MacDonald says she drove back to the Huyskens' home and paramedics were called, but according to the agreed statements of facts, by that time there was nothing they could do. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Censored Ford files to be released

Coming soon to a headline near you.
Remaining blacked-out info could be made public in December

After a lengthy court battle, a Superior Court judge has ordered the remaining blacked-out information in a police document about an investigation into Mayor Rob Ford, his alleged activities and friend Alexander Lisi be made public.

Following a fight launched by Toronto media outlets two months ago, Justice Ian Nordheimer delivered a decision Wednesday that championed the media and public's right to free expression while chastising the provincial Crown for "vague" arguments that were "at odds" with the principle of open courts set out by the Supreme Court of Canada.

"We are dealing with the actions of the duly elected Mayor of the country's largest city and the extensive investigation undertaken by the police into those actions," Nordheimer wrote in his decision. "In terms of legal proceedings, it is hard to conceive of a matter that would be of more importance to the public interest, at this particular point in time, than the one that is presented by this case in the context in which it has unfolded."

The remaining information, which includes wiretap details, won't be available until at least Dec. 6, Nordheimer ruled, to give the attorney general time to consider an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. The information could be released sooner if those involved are advised an appeal won't be sought.

Accountability

"The real winners here are the people of Toronto. They finally get to know everything that this document reveals about the actions of the mayor."
Lawyer Ryder Gilliland

After the heavily censored document was first released on Oct. 31, the judge ordered that additional portions be made public on Nov. 20.

Those details, police interviews and surveillance, weave a troubling narrative of Ford's alleged activity, including drinking and driving, snorting cocaine and abusing staff. None of the allegations has been proven in court.

The final details that Nordheimer ruled Wednesday could be released are what police learned from wiretaps during Project Traveller — a guns and gangs investigation that centered on an Etobicoke apartment complex — and sections Lisi's lawyer said would negatively affect his right to a fair trial. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The stroll must go on

Dogs enjoy their snowy walk in the Beaches Wednesday after the first snowfall of note this season hit the GTA Tuesday night. The city saw a few centimetres of accumulation overnight, with slightly more towards York and Durham regions. East of Toronto our neighbours had a lot more and to the south the Americans were having problems travelling on their Thanksgiving weekend because of the white stuff. More flurries are forecast for the GTA over the next few days, but no great accumulations are expected.

COLIN MCCONNELL/ TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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It's got his blessing. Pope Francis says homeless Jesus is 'beautiful'

For two years, it was the sculpture nobody would take: a life-sized Jesus sleeping on a park bench with his bare feet, wounded from his crucifixion, poking out from under a blanket.

But now Jesus the Homeless and its Canadian sculptor have a new fan in the Vatican: Pope Francis.

Timothy Schmalz, of St. Jacobs, Ont., brought the original wooden model of his sculpture to St. Peter's Square last Wednesday to present to the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. After his weekly general audience, the Pope prayed over the statue and blessed it, Schmalz said.

"It is very, very amazing for a sculptor to have that," he said. "After, the Vatican officials introduced me to Pope Francis and he said he thought Jesus the Homeless was a beautiful sculpture. So needless to say, I'm very excited about that."

The model is going to stay in one of the Vatican houses, he said, and he is working to find an outdoor location near St. Peter's for the full-sized bronze version.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Pope Francis praying at a model of the Jesus the Homeless sculpture by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz in St. Peter's Square on Nov. 20. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Meeting with premier

Employers seek clarity on unpaid internships

Ontario employers want a sit-down meeting with the premier to discuss clarifying the murky rules on unpaid internships — something they say would benefit both interns and the companies that take them on.

The Ontario Workforce Shortage Coalition, which represents more than 100,000 public and private sector employers, asked for the meeting after delivering a report to Premier Kathleen Wynne last week. The report contains a set of recommendations the government should adopt to address the mismatched economy in the province, including the creation of a public education campaign on internship standards.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Woman dies of cancer after delayed diagnosis

Legal papers filed Nov. 12. Missed tumour was eventually found less than four months before Houda Rafle's death

Houda Rafle has died after battling advanced cancer. Before her death, she said a Trillium radiologist missed seeing a tumour near her heart on a CT scan. DAVID COOPER/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

A 28-year-old Toronto woman has died less than four months after learning that she had cancer — and that her diagnosis and treatment had been delayed because of a hospital error.

Houda Rafle passed away early Wednesday, just as she was starting legal action against Trillium Health Partners and a radiologist for bungling a diagnostic test.

Legal papers were filed on Nov. 12, but the young television producer's health took a turn for the worse and she ended up in hospital, where she stayed until she died.

"There are no words to describe the horrible impact the events giving rise to this action have had on my life and the lives of my family," she wrote in a press release she had prepared with her lawyer.

"But I am not doing this because I am angry or because I want to lay blame. The truth is I am concerned for many others whose lives can be destroyed if nothing changes."

Rafle's nightmare began on March 5 when she went to Trillium, complaining of shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting. A CT scan of her heart revealed a 1.6-centimetre mass, but radiologist Dr. Ivo "Ivan" Slezic failed to notice it, says her statement of claim.

It wasn't until she returned to the hospital five months later, complaining of a persistent cough, that the mass was detected on a new CT. But by this time it had grown to 2.5 cm and spread to her lungs. Rifle was diagnosed with stage IV angiosarcoma, which also eventually spread to her brain.

Slezic stopped working after his privileges were restricted at Trillium on April 1.

The hospital subsequently brought in outside experts to review 3,500 CT scans and mammograms that were originally read by Slezic. That process is ongoing, said hospital spokesperson Carol Kotacka.

Rafle's story has touched many, including Health Minister Deb Matthews, who took the unusual step of making a personal phone call to the young woman after seeing her in the media.

"It's not something I usually do. In her case, I saw her do an interview…. I thought her spirit was beautiful and I wanted to reach out to her so I did," Matthews said.

"It's so sad, just so sad…. My heart just broke for her," the minister continued.

Matthews said she expects to soon make an announcement on improving quality assurance in radiology across the province. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Wanted: Change

"… I am not doing this because I am angry or because I want to lay blame. The truth is I am concerned for many others whose lives can be destroyed if nothing changes." Houda Rafle

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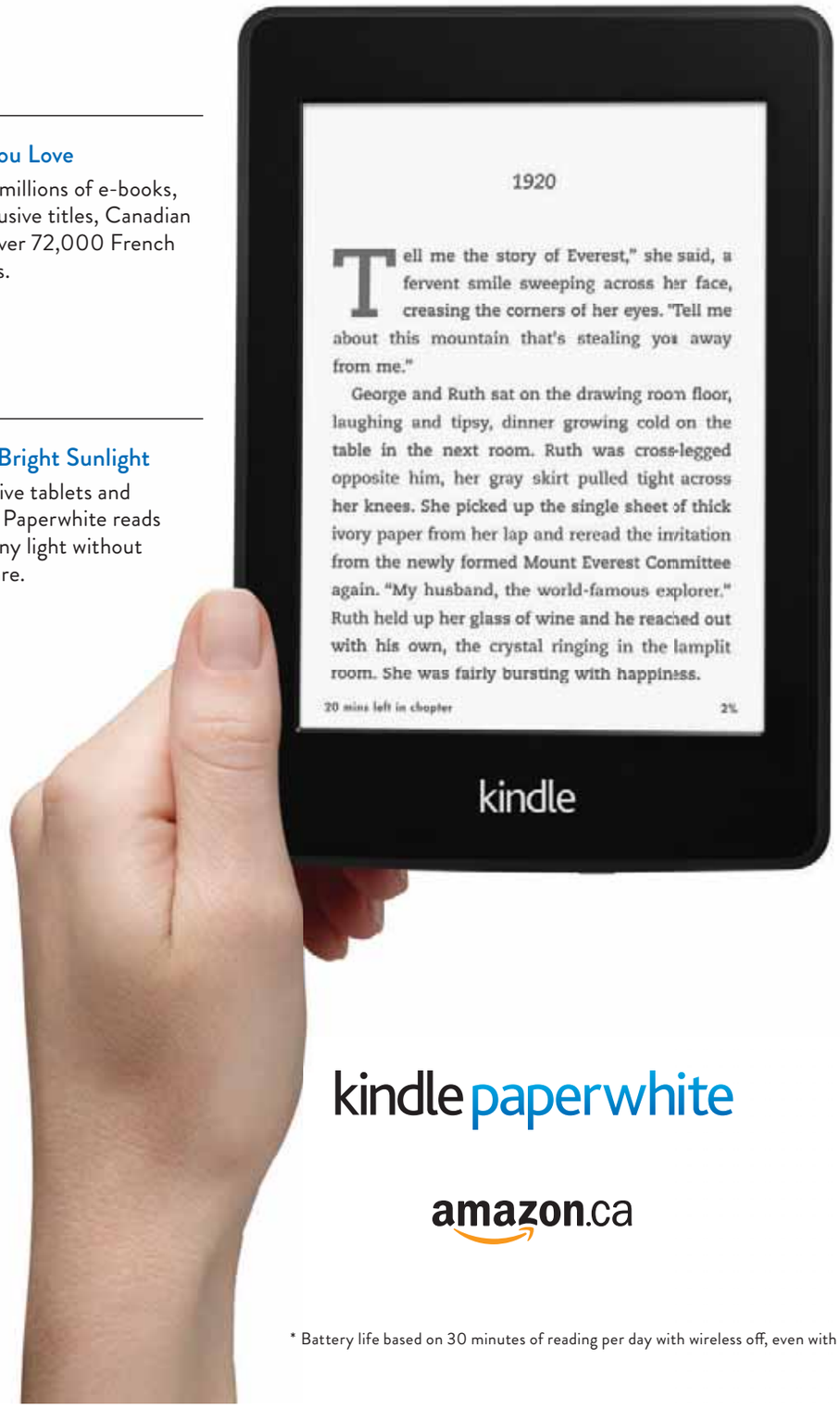

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Orchestrator of homicide seeks new trial

Court. Police didn't properly explain rights to Melissa Todorovic after stabbing of Stefanie Rengel: Lawyer

Melissa Todorovic
CONTRIBUTED/THE CANADIAN PRESS

A young woman convicted of murder for using taunts and sexual blackmail to pressure her boyfriend into killing a 14-year-old girl is innocent, her lawyer said Wednesday after appealing her case.

Melissa Todorovic told police, shortly after her boyfriend stabbed Stefanie Rengel six times and left her to die in a snowbank on New Year's Day 2008, that the murder was more her idea than her boyfriend's.

During police interviews the 15-year-old girl admitted she knew David Bagshaw was heading to Rengel's house that night to kill her, that she called him 15 minutes after the murder asking, "Is she dead?" and that she asked Bagshaw to come over to her house so he could demonstrate how he had killed Rengel.

But mistakes that police made in taking those statements mean they never should have been allowed as evidence at her trial, lawyer Brian Snell told the Court of Appeal for Ontario.

"The admissibility of those statements went a long way to convicting her and it was a miscarriage of justice that that happened," Snell said after the hearing.

Todorovic never met Rengel, but the younger girl became the target of intense teenage jealousy since she had briefly dated Bagshaw two years earlier and Todorovic believed Rengel was spreading rumours about her.

Todorovic also told police at the time that she didn't think Bagshaw would take her seriously when she told him to kill Rengel, saying she was only joking.

If the Appeal Court dismisses Todorovic's attempt at a new trial, her lawyer asked them to change her adult sentence to a youth one.

The judges reserved their decision. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Who needs a tracksuit when you can run in style?

Kevin Bourgeois accepts a prize for best costume in the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon 5-kilometre race during the Canada Running Series award night on Wednesday. He and Johnathan Puddle ran the race in head-to-toe body suits that looked like tuxedos. Krista DuChene of Brantford, who placed second among Canadian woman, was the guest of honour. The STWM raised a total of $3,858,072 for charities in 2013. JESSICA SMITH/METRO

NDP. Horwath wants to limit public-sector CEO wages

Ontario's New Democrats want to cap the salaries of CEOs at hospitals, electrical utilities and all public-sector agencies at $418,000, twice the premier's annual salary.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says taxpayers are not being respected when Ontario Power Generation CEO Tom Mitchell is paid $1.7 million a year while homeowners pay some of the highest electricity rates in Canada.

Andrea Horwath
TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

And she says nurses are being laid off while hospital CEOs pull in hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

Horwath says her bill to put a ceiling on compensation for public-sector bosses mirrors similar laws in France and the United States, where President Barack Obama put a $400,000 cap on executives whose companies receive public money.

Her private member's bill would allow for some exemptions on a case-by-case basis for executives with very specific skill sets, such as nuclear engineers.

Government Services Minister John Milloy says the Liberals have agreed to consider hard caps on some public-sector salaries, and promises to "implement new measures in the coming months."

Milloy points out the government already froze salaries for executives at hospitals, universities, colleges, school boards and provincially owned electricity companies as part of its deficit-fighting efforts. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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He wins some, he skates some

Canadian speed skater Charles Hamelin, the defending Olympic champion in the 500 metre and 5,000 metre relay events, is seen on the left with his brother and teammate Francois at the former Maple Leafs Gardens rink on Wednesday. Word is Hamelin has a good shot at being the Canadian opening ceremony flag-bearer in Sochi. RICHARD LAUTENS/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

YWCA fund gives hope to women fleeing abuse

December 6. Initiative provides interest-free loans of up to $750

JESSICA SMITH CROSS
jessica.smithcross@metronews.ca

A donation to the December 6 Fund will help a woman flee domestic abuse — and then it'll help another woman, and another.

The YWCA is asking for donations to the fund as part of "Giving Tuesday," a campaign that asks people to make a charitable donation after the discount shopping days Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

The December 6 Fund — named after the date of the 1989 Montreal Massacre at L'École Polytechnique — gives women who are leaving domestic abuse short-term, interest-free loans of up to $750, which most often go to help them secure first and last month's rent. The women pay it back in small, monthly withdrawals from their account.

"Basically it helps them re-establish their lives and safety," said the YWCA's Attiya Khan, who manages the fund. "Too often a woman must choose between the roof over her head and physical or psychological safety.

"I believe no one should have to stay in abusive situations because they can't afford to leave."

In 2012, 88 women, along with their 153 children, used $55,500 in loans. About 73 per cent was repaid. All of the women are from Toronto or Peel, have a bank account, a source of income (which includes social assistance) and a letter of referral, which typically comes from a social service agency, doctor or shelter.

Women are proud to repay the loan, said Khan. "Every payment they make goes back in to help someone else."

To donate to the December 6 Fund, go to ywcatoronto.org/donate.

Funding a way out

"Basically it helps (victims of abuse) re-establish their lives and safety."

Attiya Khan, of the YWCA on the December 6 Fund for women escaping domestic abuse

Reasons to give

Some of the women who have used the fund have told the YWCA their stories about the abuse they faced and how the fund helped them.

- One woman escaped an abusive partner via a third-storey window and ended up with broken bones and needing emergency surgery. "I knew I had to get away or I would not survive," she told the YWCA. She wasn't able to work while recovering, was evicted from her apartment with her son, and lost all their belongings when she couldn't pay for storage. With the $750 loan, she was able to get an apartment for her and her son.
- A second woman told the YWCA she was fleeing a partner with a substance abuse problem and explosive anger issues. She used the money to leave with her daughter and find a new place to live. "We had time to enjoy each other's company with no stress before a busy day," she told the YWCA.

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Doug Wright is the Markham man who has collected and washed 892 teddy bears — his goal was 500. The bears fill half his garage. He is hoping to donate them to Christmas toy drives. Alas, because of sanitary concerns, nobody will take them. STEVE RUSSELL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Second-hand teddies homeless

Markham. Self-described 'teddy bear man' collected hundreds of bears and washed them, hoping to give them a home for the holidays

These stuffed animals have been tossed aside once already; virtually unsellable at summer garage sales, dropped off at recycling shelters alongside discarded plastic and ripped up cardboard.

But for the last three years Markham's self-described "teddy bear man" has lovingly collected them by the hundreds and spent weekends painstakingly washing them, hoping to give them a new home for the holidays.

Some are as small as beanie babies, others life-size prizes leftover from fairs, but Doug Wright picks them up, cleans them off — not all survive the trip through the washing machine — and delivers them to the local fire hall's annual toy drive. Now the fire hall no longer wants them since most charities have policies against second-hand stuffed animals, so this year's mammoth haul — 892 stuffed bunnies and bears and giant penguins — has nowhere to go.

"I'm really not sure what to do with them," said Wright, a retired teacher, eyeing his gold convertible which has sat unusable in his garage the last few weeks, roof down to accommodate clear plastic bags jammed with the toys.

On Thursday, he'll drop them off at the fire hall, but whether they end up in the arms of new kids remains to be seen and the fire hall, which is mulling sending this year's crop to the Philippines, adamant they won't take any more. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Quoted

"Those stuffed animals can't really be cleaned because of the material."

Marie Bomba, director of hospital/foundation relations at The Hospital for Sick Children on why they can't take the teddy bears.

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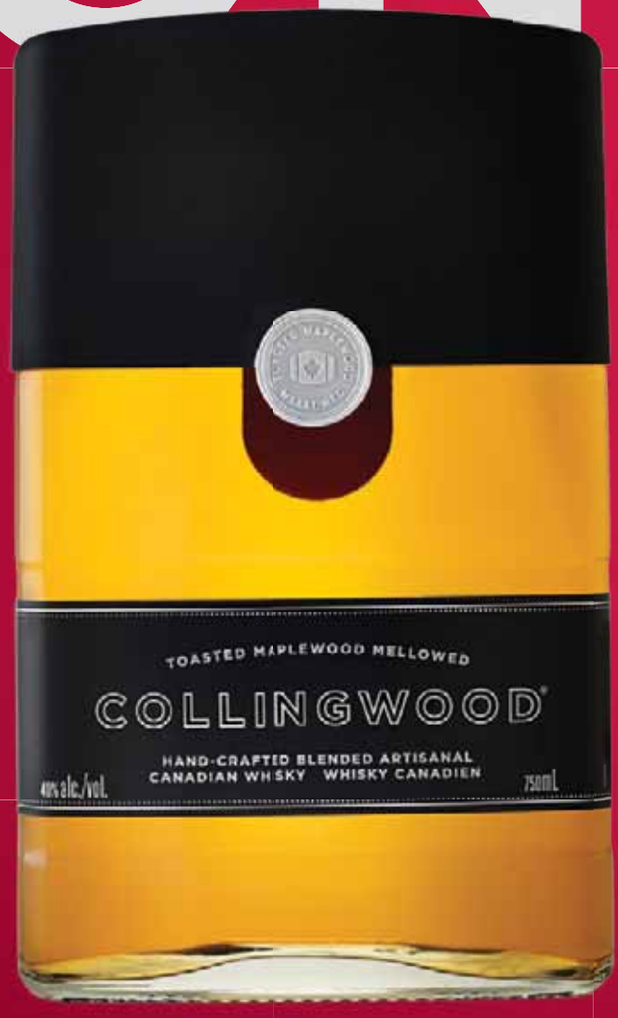

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Racism threatens to drive business owner out of town

Manitoba. Restaurant owner Thea Morris says she plans to leave the space by the end of December

For the second time in several months, a restaurant owner in the small Manitoba community of Morris says she is being chased out of town by discrimination.

Thea Morris, the Jamaican-born owner of Thea's Diner, said Wednesday she has received an email referencing the Ku Klux Klan and has been told by one of her customers that people are avoiding her business because she is black.

And since the KKK email, some customers have been behaving strangely, she said. People who appear to be in their 50s and very well dressed come in, in groups of two or three, and quickly leave.

"They'll come in and sit down and order their beverage to start, and by the time you'd take the beverage to them, they would get up and walk out.

"It has come across as intimidating."

Morris opened her diner in June, in the exact same spot that used to house Pots N Hands, which was run by a gay couple.

The town of Morris

"One older gentleman told me the reason people were not coming into my restaurant was because of my colour."

Thea Morris, the Jamaican-born owner of Thea's Diner.

Pots N Hands owner Dave Claringbould and his partner closed down in April. He said they were subjected to homophobic slurs, including one customer who asked whether the food contained disease.

Morris, who lives in Winnipeg, said she had hoped things would be different for her. Business was good in the summer, but customers mostly stopped coming at the end of August, she said. Then a series of strange events had her worried for her safety.

Someone left a dead hawk on the windshield of a worker's car, she said. When she placed an online ad for restaurant staff, she received a reply from someone who claimed to be linked to the Ku Klux Klan and who asked whether Morris residents were "still chasing colours" out of town, she added. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Leaked document

NSA spied on radicals' online porn habits

The Huffington Post cited a secret National Security Agency document that allegedly reveals the U.S. agency spied on the online sexual activity of Islamist radicals in order to find ways to discredit them. The website said the document, leaked by ex-NSA contractor Edward Snowden, shows the organization tracked six unnamed "radicalizers" and their visits to pornographic websites. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Northern Ohio

Chemical leak sparks evacuation

A city official says authorities have contained a spill at a northern Ohio rail yard where potentially flammable liquid (used to make plastic and rubber products) leaked from a railcar, prompting the evacuation of hundreds of nearby homes. Cleanup workers from transportation company CSX Corp. were at the scene Wednesday in Willard. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Racers rally for women drivers in Saudi Arabia

Former Finnish rally driver, Ari Vatanen, left, and Tunisian rally driver, Hend Chaouch, second right in red, pose as they take part in a protest against Saudi Arabia's ban on women driving, in Paris on Wednesday. Though no specific Saudi law bans women from driving, women are not issued licences. They mostly rely on drivers or male relatives to move around. CHRISTOPHE ENA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Tax scam? Mulcair hits out at boss of the Mint

Tom Mulcair is calling on the Harper government to fire the chairman of the Royal Canadian Mint over his alleged role in a tax avoidance scheme.

The NDP leader's call follows the disclosure of court documents that suggest Jim Love counselled a wealthy family on the use of offshore tax havens to avoid paying taxes in Canada. Love, a Toronto tax lawyer, is a friend of, and tax adviser to, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty.

Although Love has never been charged with any offence, Mulcair says he should have been fired the moment the scheme came to light.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Court arguments

Naked-judge panel in spotlight

Lawyers argued Wednesday over whether the Federal Court has the authority to review a panel looking into the case of a Manitoba judge whose nude photos ended up on the Internet.

Manitoba Queen's Bench Justice Lori Douglas' lawyers have sought a judicial review, alleging a panel investigating her is biased.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Teen charged

When a slap is not a game

An 18-year-old student in Tilbury, Ont., is facing assault charges after a schoolyard game left another student with a concussion.

Police say a 16-year-old student offered to let classmates slap him for cash. But after one slap he lost consciousness and struck his head on the ground. It's unclear how much money he received.

LUKE SIMCOE/METRO ONLINE

Generic 'hillbilly heroin' gets green light in Canada

Banned in U.S. Ottawa officials approve India drugmaker's take on oxycodone despite warnings from experts south of the border

Oxycodone is often referred to as "hillbilly heroin." The U.S. warns about its generic use. GRAEME ROY/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Health Canada has approved a generic, more dangerous form of oxycodone just as U.S. officials urge their Canadian counterparts to ban such formulations of the painkiller — often known as "hillbilly heroin."

The green light to Ranbaxy, India's biggest drug maker, came soon after Gil Kerlikowske, director of the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, reminded Health Minister Rona Ambrose of the dangers posed by generic forms of the opioid.

The U.S. has banned generic oxycodone because it's too easy for addicts to snort or inject.

Only tamper-resistant forms of the drug can be sold.

American officials say the U.S. is dealing with a painkiller abuse epidemic.

Health Canada defended itself, saying it "rigorously" assesses every drug's safety and efficacy.

"These decisions are made by experts in the department based on science; the minister is not consulted on day-to-day drug approvals," said spokesperson Leslie Meerburg.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Fast facts

What you need to know about oxycodone.

- **What is it?** A powerful narcotic used to treat moderate to severe short-term or long-term pain, as well as to treat terminally-ill patients.
- **What does it do?** It produces an opiate-like effect similar to morphine and can lead to abuse.
- **Brand names?** OxyContin, Percocet, Endocet, Oxycocet, Percodan, Endodan, Oxycodan, Supeudol, OxylR, OxyNEO.
- **How is it abused?** Generic forms can be chewed or crushed, inhaled or injected.

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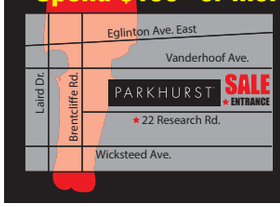

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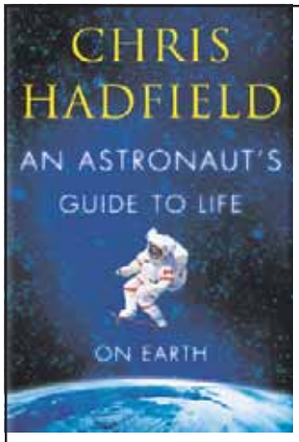

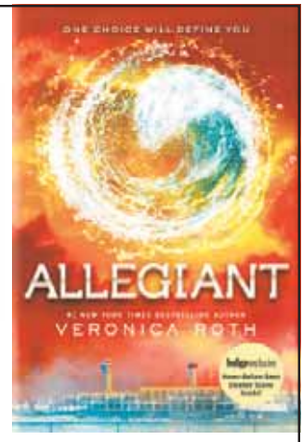

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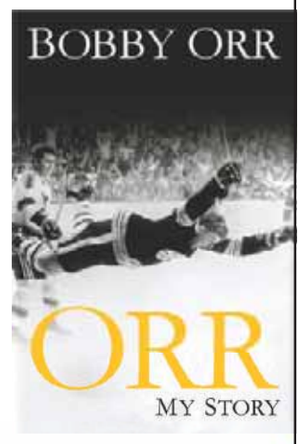

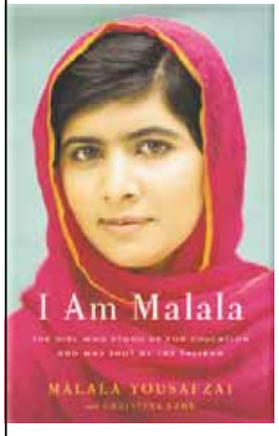

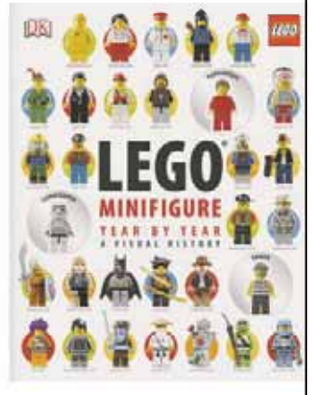

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Giant Louis Vuitton suitcase booted out of Red Square

Tourists and visitors pass by a two-storey Louis Vuitton suitcase erected near the Kremlin, right, at Red Square in Moscow, Russia, Wednesday. Politicians didn't like it, the public didn't like it, so the gigantic Louis Vuitton suitcase is being booted out of the square. The GUM department store, left, which is responsible for the nine-metre-high, 30-metre-long construction, promised Wednesday that it would be dismantled. The construction is part of an exhibition called The Soul of Travel, marking Vuitton's 150th anniversary and was to open on Dec. 2. Louis Vuitton said the construction was a copy of a model owned by a Russian noble, Prince Vladimir Orlov. PAVEL GOLOVKIN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Berlusconi kicked out of Parliament

Not going quietly. Former premier has relaunched his Forza Italia party and he still commands millions of loyal supporters

The Italian Senate on Wednesday expelled three-time ex-premier Silvio Berlusconi from Parliament over his tax fraud conviction, ending his two-decade legislative run for now, but not his political career.

Berlusconi has warned that the unprecedented move would embarrass Italy internationally, and he maintained his defiance even as the Senate voted, addressing a cheering crowd outside of his Roman palazzo a short walk away.

Even though he won't hold a seat in Parliament for at least six years, the 77-year-old Berlusconi pledged to remain involved in politics and urged his followers not to despair — noting that other political leaders are not lawmakers.

Supporters, including Berlusconi's 28-year-old girlfriend, who had a Forza Italia flag wrapped around her shoulders against the cold, were treated to a video montage of Berlusconi's greatest political hits from a career that began in 1994 when he first came into power with a political party named for a soccer chant — Let's Go Italy.

"For us, he will always be there," said Marilda Antonello as she held a banner reading: "The law is not equal for everyone. Sick justice."

Silvio Berlusconi and his girlfriend Francesca Pascale leave after he addressed a rally in Rome, Wednesday. ROBERTO MONALDO, LAPRESSE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Senate vote on whether to remove Berlusconi from the chamber stems from a 2012 law that bans anyone sentenced to more than two years in prison from holding or running for public office for six years. His lawyers claim the law is unconstitutional and have questioned why there's a rush to expel him while legal challenges are still pending.

Italy's high court on Aug. 1 upheld Berlusconi's tax fraud conviction and four-year prison term. The prison term was reduced automatically to one year under a general amnesty; he will serve his time either under house arrest or through public service.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bitter words

"We are here on a bitter day, a day of mourning for democracy."
Silvio Berlusconi

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Syrian refugees sexually harassed: Watchdog

Lebanon no safe haven. 500 cases have been reported against women, UN says

Female refugees from Syria are being sexually harassed by employers, landlords and others in Lebanon, adding another layer of suffering for those who have fled their homes in search of safety, an international human rights watchdog said Wednesday.

In a report, Human Rights Watch said most of the incidents have gone unreported to local authorities due to the women's fear of reprisals by the abusers or arrest for not having a valid residency permit.

Lebanon is the biggest recipient of Syrians fleeing the nearly three-year civil war, which has killed more than 100,000 people and displaced millions. The country of 4.5 million people has taken in more than 1 million Syrian refugees, straining its resources.

Many Lebanese have opened their homes to them, but there are underlying tensions and, as the numbers swell, the Syrians often face hostility.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

"Women who have fled death and destruction in Syria should find a safe haven, not sexual abuse, in Lebanon."

Liesl Gerntholtz, women's rights director at the New York-based group Human Rights Watch

A Syrian refugee sits next to her baby at a school playground where she lives with her family and relatives temporarily in Lebanon. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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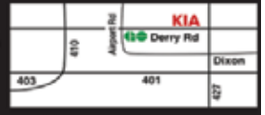

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Latvian supermarket collapse. PM resigns

Paintings hang on a fence in front of the Maxima supermarket in Riga, Latvia, where a collapse killed scores of people. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Latvia's prime minister resigned Wednesday in the wake of a supermarket collapse that killed 54 people and provoked outrage among the Baltic country's citizens.

Valdis Dombrovskis' unexpected announcement, which automatically triggers the fall of the entire centre-right government, followed his meeting with President Andris Berzins.

"Considering the ... tragedy and all the related circumstances, the country needs a government that has a majority support in parliament and can solve the situation that has arisen in the country," Dombrovskis told journalists after meeting the president.

Police have opened a criminal investigation into the cause of last week's tragedy. Possible explanations for the disaster include a flawed design, substandard construction materials, and corruption.

Some people have suggested that the abolition of a construction authority by Dombrovskis' budget-slashing government weakened oversight.

Many Latvians have expressed deep skepticism that the guilty parties will bear criminal liability and have gone so far as to demand that foreign engineers be invited to help the investigation.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

French law

Firing over refusal to remove headscarf OK: Appeals Court

The Paris Appeals Court, overturning a high court decision, ruled on Wednesday that a private nursery school was justified in firing an assistant director who refused to remove her Islamic head scarf while on the job.

The decision was the fourth in the emblematic case of the firing of Fatima Afif at the Baby Loup nursery school five years ago. It was likely to provide fodder for lawmakers and associations seeking a law to ensure the highly prized French value of "laicite," or secularism.

Laws already ban head scarves in public school classrooms and face-covering veils in public spaces. There is no French law regulating religious apparel in private institutions, schools or companies. Many Muslims have seen the two laws in place as an infringement on their religious freedom and freedom of expression.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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What the heck? Rob Ford still in office?

Sheriff sounds off. 'We will not tolerate illegal drug activity in my jurisdiction by anyone'

An American sheriff who has just charged a town mayor with drug offences said Wednesday it's a head-scratcher why the continent's most notorious crack smoker, Rob Ford, is still in office.

Gordon Smith, a self-described politically incorrect sheriff from Bradford County in Florida, said he's watched the Ford situation unfold with amazement.

"He's so flamboyant, he's out there, he's kind of smearing it in Torontonians faces, saying, 'What are you going to do?'" Smith said from Starke, Fla.

"He is the face of Toronto, and that's all you see plastered in the news media and people are going, 'What the heck?' "

In a statement announcing Monday's arrest of Mayor Barry Moore of Hampton, Fla., population 500, Smith said he wouldn't put up with illicit drug activity, regardless of who is involved.

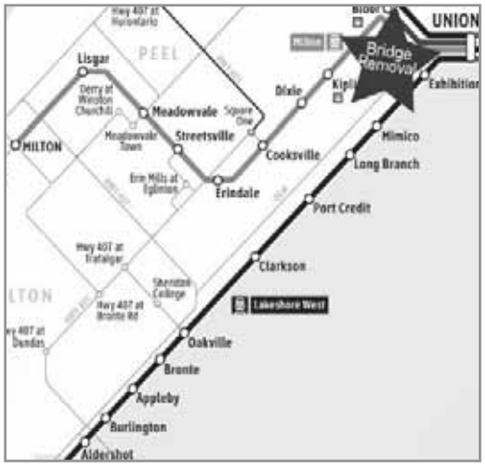
"This isn't Toronto," he said.

"We will not tolerate illegal drug activity in my jurisdiction by anyone, to include our elected officials."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Toronto Mayor Rob Ford has denied consorting with prostitutes and insists he is not an alcoholic or drug addict. CHRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Weekend Closure
Lakeshore West GO Train Line
November 30 - December 1, 2013



The City of Toronto is removing the Dufferin Street bridge and in order to do it quickly and safely, **GO needs to shut down train service on the Lakeshore West line**.

What You Need to Know
There will be no GO Train service on the Lakeshore West line from: **Saturday, November 30, 2:00 a.m. — Monday, December 2, 2:00 a.m.** Regular service will resume as of 5:00 a.m. on Monday, December 2. The GO Buses that normally connect to trains in Hamilton will also be cancelled during this time. Bus service between Niagara and Burlington will run between Niagara and Hamilton instead.

The Alternatives
To help get you to where you need to go, we will be running trains on our Milton line all weekend. Most Milton line GO stations are not too far from Lakeshore West stations. We're also increasing bus service on our Hamilton-Toronto Express route.

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METROLINX

The housing crunch. It's getting harder and harder to own a home, says Royal Bank report

Higher prices and an increase in mortgage rates have made home affordability more of a problem for the average Canadian family, says a new report from the Royal Bank of Canada.

RBC's latest research on the portion of average household income needed to maintain a home shows that affordability deteriorated over the summer, the second consecutive drop in as many quarters.

The level of deterioration differs from region to region and between types of homes, but for the average bungalow the affordability measure rose 0.7 of a percentage point to 43.3 per cent nationally in the third quarter, after a 0.3-percentage-point gain in the second quarter.

That means the average household would have needed to devote 43.3 per cent of its pre-tax income to service the cost of owning a bungalow at current market values, including mortgage payments, utilities and municipal taxes. The higher the rating, the less affordable a home is to any particular family.

For two-storey homes, the affordability reading rose 0.6 or a percentage point to 48.9 per cent in the July-September period.

Owning a condominium was the most affordable option, with a cost measure of 28 per cent of pre-tax income, and the most stable, up just 0.1 of a percentage point from the previous period.

RBC chief economist Craig Wright attributed the deterioration in affordability to higher prices and what has been a tightening mortgage market reacting to an expectation of firming interest rates.

"By the third quarter, strong resale activity across Canada heated up home prices a few degrees," he explained.

"At the same time, Canadian bond yields rose in tandem with those in the U.S., climbing in anticipation of the Fed (U.S. Federal Reserve) tapering its bond buying program."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

What you pay

$391,820 the resale price

The most recent Canadian Real Estate Association report pegged the average resale price of a home at $391,820 in October, 8.5 per cent more than a year earlier. In Toronto, the affordability measure rose 1.3 percentage point to 55.6 per cent.

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‘Assad’s nun’ emerges as Syria’s controversial power broker

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam of the Cross. Supporters see her as a brave truth-teller, but critics accuse her of spreading lies

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam Of The Cross walks with people fleeing the rebel-held suburb of Moadamiyeh to the government-held territory in Damascus, in this photo from last month. Amid Syria’s brutal civil war, the nun has emerged as an unlikely power broker. DUSAN VRANIC/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Amid Syria’s ferocious civil war, a nun has emerged as an unlikely power broker and figure of controversy.

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam of the Cross has thrust herself into the role of go-between and publicist, arranging ceasefires, organizing pro-government media trips and conducting speaking tours as perhaps the country’s most prominent critic of the uprising against President Bashar Assad.

Anti-government activists scathingly call her “Assad’s nun” for claiming a chemical attack that killed hundreds was exaggerated, and for saying rebels used kidnapped babies in massacres that were blamed on Syrian forces.

She is so despised by the opposition that even acts of seeming goodwill are criticized, such as arranging a rare truce that allowed thousands to leave a blockaded town.

Supporters see her as a brave truth-teller, and she reflects the fears of many Syrians who worry that hard-line Muslim rebels trying to overthrow Assad will make life intolerable for Christians and other minorities.

The nun insists she is not an Assad propagandist, describing his family’s decades-long hold over Syria as a “tumour,” but she saves her harshest criticism for the rebels.

“The rebels presented themselves as the doctor who will remove this tumour,” she said in a recent Skype interview. “They imposed arms as a treatment, and it is killing Syria.”

The 61-year-old was skeptical of the Syrian uprising from the start.

She claimed much of the footage of anti-Assad demonstrations posted to social media networks was faked, along with video of Syrian forces beating and killing protesters

In May 2012, after Assad-loyal forces massacred dozens of Sunni men, women and children in the Houla region, she claimed the slain children were Alawites — members of Assad’s sect — who had been kidnapped by rebels.

She made a similar claim after hundreds of civilians were killed in a chemical attack on rebel-held suburbs of Damascus on Aug. 21.

Agnes-Mariam is now on a speaking tour of Canada, the U.S. and Britain. But she withdrew from an anti-war conference in London this weekend after other speakers threatened to quit if she participated.

In Britain’s weekly Spectator, one writer called her “the Syrian equivalent of one of Hitler’s brown priests.” Peter Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch said she “abuses her religious status to spread her lies.”

To others, she is a humanitarian who is informing the West by correcting biased media reporting.

For her part, the nun said she is doing her flawed best.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

“I am not the awaited-for Messiah. I am trying to work as a human.”

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam

U.S. bombers test China’s new air zone

China acknowledged Wednesday it let two American B-52 bombers fly unhindered through its newly declared air defence zone in the East China Sea despite its earlier threat to take defensive measures against unidentified foreign aircraft.

The U.S. flights, which tested the Chinese zone for the first time since it was declared over the weekend, raised questions about Beijing’s determination to enforce its requirement that foreign aircraft identify themselves and accept Chinese instructions.

China’s lack of any action suggested that it was playing out a diplomatic game to establish ownership over the area rather than provoke an international incident.

The flights followed days of angry rhetoric and accusations over Beijing’s move, designed to assert Chinese claims to a group of uninhabited islands controlled by Japan. The U.S. and Japan have said they don’t acknowledge the zone, and Taiwan and South Korea, both close to the U.S., also rejected it.

A man uses his cellphone near a replica of a Chinese-made fighter jet in Beijing on Wednesday. China said it had monitored two U.S. bombers that flew over the East China Sea in defiance of Beijing’s declaration it was exercising greater military control over the area. NG HAN GUAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden will raise objections over the Chinese declaration when he visits the country next week, senior administration officials said in Washington on condition their names not be used. They said Biden would press Beijing policymakers on the “unsettling” pattern of how they deal with neighbours.

But State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that U.S. civilian air carriers were being advised “to take all steps they consider necessary to operate safely in the East China sea region.”

Psaki did not specify what those steps might be and stopped short of saying airlines should provide flight details to Chinese authorities. She said the U.S. was still attempting to determine whether China’s new rules apply to civil aviation commercial air flight.

A Chinese Defence Ministry statement said the U.S. B-52s planes were detected and monitored as they flew through the area for two hours and 22 minutes. It said all aircraft flying through the zone would be monitored and that “China has the capability to exercise effective control over the relevant airspace.”

Dangerous liaisons

Beijing’s move fits a pattern of putting teeth behind its territorial claims and is seen as potentially leading to dangerous encounters depending on how vigorously China enforces it — and how cautious it is when intercepting aircraft from Japan, the U.S. and other countries.

The U.S., which has hundreds of military aircraft based in the region, described the flights as a training mission unrelated to China’s announcement of the zone. U.S. officials said the two unarmed B-52 bombers took off from their home base in Guam around midday and were in the zone that encompasses the disputed islands for less than an hour before returning to their base.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dominican Republic cancels talks with Haiti

The Dominican Republic announced Wednesday that it would no longer meet with Haitian officials to talk about a court ruling that could strip citizenship from those born to migrants living in the country illegally.

The decision comes a day after the Caribbean Community criticized the ruling and said it would defer a Dominican request to become a member of the trade bloc.

Dominican Presidential Minister Gustavo Montalvo said the government cancelled a meeting scheduled for Saturday in Venezuela because it feels Haiti violated an earlier agreement to prioritize bilateral dialogue in the case. “Haiti has chosen to take another road and that puts an end to our conversations at this time,” he said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Beijing cracks down on pollution one barbecue grill at a time

China. Country's concern about particulate pollution from open-air barbecues criticized on social media sites

Beijing is waging a controversial war against air pollution.

Authorities in the capital have destroyed more than 500 open-air barbecues "to cut PM2.5" — the tiny particulate matter in the air that can enter deep into the lungs.

Photos carried by state media showed workers on Tuesday cutting pieces of metal with sparks flying as city wardens looked on.

Citizens online ridiculed the exercise, suggesting authorities should focus on bigger sources of pollution.

Chinese police observe as a worker breaks down confiscated open-air barbecues in Beijing's war to tame PM2.5 pollution. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A media officer at Beijing's Xicheng district administration bureau said the hundreds of barbecue grills were confiscated over a three-month campaign and cut up so they couldn't be used again. She refused to give her name, as is common with Chinese officials.

Environmental campaigner Ma Jun said residents had complained to environmental agencies about the odour and smoke from open-air barbecues. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Environmentalist

Vehicle emissions 'should be priority'

"This action will help local residents, but to deal with the bigger air-quality problem we need to have priorities and I think one of the major priorities should still be the motor-vehicle emissions," said environmental campaigner Ma Jun.

He said the focus should be on improving the fuel quality and emissions control of heavy-duty diesel trucks, while involving surrounding regions, not just Beijing. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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An activist is detained in Moscow in 2009. As the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi approach, Russia has been saying a law banning homosexual "propaganda" does not discriminate against gays. ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO/AP PHOTO

Kremlin ups its anti-gay stance

Prime-time broadcast. Government-controlled channel demonizes gay couples as part of homophobic rhetoric ramp up

Anyone who switched on Russian TV recently might have been forgiven for thinking the Kremlin was relaxing its hard line on gays: Images of rainbow flags and a happy same-sex couple looking adoringly at their child flashed across the screen.

But the show, with its horror film music and juddering camera work, was another swipe at the gay community — not a gust of tolerance. The force behind it is one of Russia's top propagandists, whose programs have helped to bring criminal charges against others on President Vladimir Putin's unofficial black list.

The prime-time broadcast on state television points to the double-game the Kremlin is playing on gay rights.

State homophobia

"There is always Russia for Russians and then Russia for the West."

Anton Krasovsky, Russian journalist fired from a Kremlin-controlled TV station after coming out as gay, talking about the government's double standard on its domestic anti-gay stance ahead of the Sochi games

To the West, as it prepares to host the Winter Olympics, Russia has sought to extend reassurances that a law passed this summer banning homosexual "propaganda" does not discriminate against gays. To its domestic audience, the government has ramped up the anti-gay rhetoric, unifying its fraying electoral base with a popular refrain of traditional values.

"In order to make people interested in the government, it chose what it thinks are topics close to the people, like this one (the gay issue)," said Anton Krasovsky, a journalist who was fired after he came out as gay on air at a Kremlin-controlled TV station.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Young Quebec hacker who paralyzed government websites gets probation

A Montreal hacker who was just 12 when he crippled several provincial government websites and shared information in exchange for video games has been sentenced to 18 months probation.

The 14-year-old pleaded guilty in October to attacks that occurred in 2012 at the height of Quebec's student protests.

The group for which he acted, Anonymous, was particularly vocal against the then-Liberal government, particularly a law limiting the right to protest.

A series of attacks targeting government-related websites ensued in response to the law, which has since been repealed.

Other people were charged in addition to the young man, whose identity is protected under youth laws.

On Wednesday, the Crown and defence recommended the probation sentence.

The Crown also said $265,904.09 was incurred in financial losses by three parties: the Montreal police, its employee credit union and the Quebec Institute of Public Health.

The boy's lawyer said the attacks weren't politically motivated and that his client wasn't old enough to grasp how much damage his actions could cause. The accused had earlier told the court his main motivation for trading data was to obtain video games. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Jason DiSanto receives a tongue piercing at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. An experimental in the right direction. The Tongue Drive System was developed at Georgia Tech and

Have pier travel (ha

Help for the paralyzed. Can a tongue ring act as a joystick for wheelchair mobility? It already is

An experimental device is letting paralyzed people drive wheelchairs simply by flicking their tongue in the right direction.

Key to this wireless system: Users get their tongue pierced with a magnetic stud that resembles jewelry and acts like a joystick, in hopes of offering them more mobility and independence.

Researchers reported Wednesday that 11 people paralyzed from the neck down rapidly learned to use the tongue device to pilot their wheelchairs through an obstacle course full of twists and turns, and to operate a computer, too.

"It's really powerful because it's so intuitive," said Jason DiSanto, 39, of Atlanta, who was among the first spinal-cord-injured patients to get his tongue pierced for science and try out the system. "The first time I did it, people thought I was driving for, like, years."

The team of researchers in Atlanta and Chicago put the Tongue Drive System to the test against one of the most widely used assistive technologies, called sip-and-puff, that users operate by breathing into a straw. Using the tongue, patients operated their wheelchairs a bit faster but just as accurately — and on average, they performed about three times better on video-game-like computer tests, said lead researcher Maysam Ghovanloo, director of Georgia Tech's bionics lab.

The research, reported in the journal Science Translational Medicine, is an early step that allowed use of the device only inside laboratories. Larger studies in real-world conditions are required before the device could ever be sold. And the tongue piercing may be a turn-off for some potential users, the researchers acknowledge.

But the work is attracting attention from specialists who say there's a big need for more assistive technologies so they can customize care for the severely disabled.

device is letting paralyzed people drive wheelchairs simply by flicking their tongue tested at the Shepherd Center. GARY MEEK/GEORGIA TECH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

cing, will ndless!)

Quoted

"For people who have very limited ability to control a power wheelchair, there aren't that many options."

Dr. Brad Dicianno, a rehabilitation specialist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, who wasn't involved with the new research

Here's how the system works: A headset detects the tongue's position when the user flicks that magnetic stud. Touch a spot on the right bottom tooth to go right, for example. The headset wirelessly beams that information to a smartphone the user carries. An app then sends the command to move the wheelchair or the computer cursor.

Why the tongue? "It's unobtrusive, easy to use and flexible," said Ghovanloo, a biomedical engineer who created the system and has started a company that is working with Georgia Tech to commercialize it.

Most people with spinal cord injuries — or neurologic diseases that also can paralyze — still can move the tongue. It doesn't require special concentration. The tongue is pretty tireless. And the amount of real estate the brain's motor cortex dedicates to the tongue and mouth rivals that of the fingers and hand, offering multiple complex movements, Ghovanloo said. He led the team of researchers from Atlanta's Shepherd Center for spinal injuries, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and Northwestern University.

DiSanto, an electrical engineer who became paralyzed from the neck down in a 2009 diving accident, said the headset is less intrusive than the sip-and-puff device that he normally uses, which requires a straw-like tube to be worn in front of his face. More important, he said, the tongue drive gave him more control, allowing him to move diagonally, for example.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Environmental impact

Tories kill off study on lead bullets

The federal government has cancelled a tender for a study on the environmental impact of lead shot and bullets.

The tender was issued earlier this month by Environment Canada, but immediately ran into opposition from shooting groups.

Tony Bernardo, spokesman for the Canadians Shooting Sports Association, called the study complete nonsense — a perspective shared by the Conservative government.

Paul Calandra, parliamentary secretary to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, has told the Commons the tender is dead. He called it a waste of taxpayers' dollars. Calandra says the government will continue to support hunters and sport shooters. THE CANADIAN PRESS

A threat to one's figure?

Pizza flour sets off hazardous materials scare

Extra cheese but hold the hazmat team, please.

A hazardous materials team in Kelowna, B.C., was called to a local park after large quantities of an unidentified white power was discovered Wednesday morning.

Platoon Capt. Kelly Stephens says both a hazmat and fire crew responded to the suspicious substance call.

Stephens says the team donned their level-B protection suits — covering them from head to toe — and entered the park with testing equipment.

Instead of a hazardous material, they discovered the white powder was the makings of pizza dough.

CKFR/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Tough sentences handed down in Egypt's crackdown

Heavy hand. Situation threatens to fragment a coalition of liberal and secular groups that supported the military

Supporter of ousted president Morsi in the prisoner's dock in Alexandria. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Egyptian authorities on Wednesday took a heavy hand against both Islamist and secular opponents, handing down heavy prison sentences to a group of female supporters of the ousted Islamist president — including teenagers as young as 15 — and ordering the detention of two dozen secular activists, all for participating in protests.

The moves mark what critics say is a bolder determination by Egypt's military-backed government to silence dissent, continuing a crackdown on Islamists since the military's ouster of President Mohammed Morsi, while suppressing secular activists who supported his removal but also accuse the new leadership of restoring a system as autocratic as Morsi's toppled predecessor, Hosni Mubarak.

Images from the courtroom in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria showed 21 young female defendants in white head scarves and white prison uniforms, handcuffed. Among them were seven teenagers aged 15 and 16, who were sentenced to prison terms until they turn 18. The rest — age 18 to 22 — were sentenced to 11 years in prison. A day earlier saw the beating and dragging of secular activists. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Volcanic alert heightened

A worker who is covered with volcanic ash from an eruption of Mount Sinabung takes a break at a coffee plantation in Guru Kinayan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Sinabung's alert status was raised to the highest level on Sunday after eruptions. BINSAR BAKKARA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pakistan

Americans criticized over drone deaths

A Pakistani political party launched an attack on the CIA drone program on Wednesday, turning up the heat on an issue that the government in Islamabad has tried to manage without sparking a crisis with the U.S.

The party revealed what it said was the name of the CIA's top spy in the country and called for him to be tried for murder.

American missile attacks targeting Islamic militants in Pakistan's northwest have long been a source of tension.

Friction has increased recently with two especially contentious strikes: one killed the Pakistani Taliban's leader as the government prepared to invite him to hold peace talks, and another outside the tribal region. But the U.S. has shown no willingness to abandon the program. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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People stand in front of a metal structure that buckled on part of the Itaquerao Stadium in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Part of the stadium that will host the 2014 World Cup opener collapsed on Wednesday, causing significant damage and killing two people, authorities said. NELSON ANTOINE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Deadly collapse at World Cup opening venue

Brazil. The Sao Paulo stadium, which cost nearly $360 million, is expected to seat nearly 70,000 for the opener

Part of the stadium that will host the 2014 World Cup opener collapsed Wednesday, killing two workers and aggravating already urgent concerns Brazil won't be ready for soccer's signature tournament.

Brazil has been plagued by a series of setbacks including cost overruns, stadium delays, accidents, labour strife and massive street protests in the run-up to the June tournament, once envisioned as a coming-out party for South America's largest nation, which is also scheduled to host the Olympics in 2016.

Wednesday's accident at Sao Paulo's Itaquerao Stadium occurred when a construction crane crashed into a 500-ton metal structure that in turn cut through the outer walls of the venue.

Already, public prosecutors and a workers union in Sao Paulo were demanding an investigation into conditions at the venue.

Ricardo Trade, CEO of the local World Cup organizing committee, said authorities would determine if there is a need to suspend construction.

"There are seven months till the World Cup, not 10 days, so I don't believe this is going to cause delays. But there is absolutely no guarantee on this," Trade said in a telephone interview.

The accident could lead to recriminations between local organizers and world soccer organization FIFA, which has set a December deadline for all 12 World Cup stadiums to be ready. The tournament begins June 12.

"I don't want to know about FIFA right now; we are worried about the families of the victims," said Andres Sanchez, former president of the Sao Paulo soccer club Corinthians, which is building the stadium. The club said workers will not return before a three-day mourning period.

One of the workers, 42-year-old Fabio Luis Pereira, was inside a truck that was hit by the metal structure. The other, 44-year-old Ronaldo Oliveira dos Santos, was resting in an area which was supposed to be off-limits.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Construction

It wasn't the first problem with World Cup stadiums in Brazil.

- One worker died during construction of a stadium in the capital Brasilia last year and another in the Manaus venue in March.
- In April, another worker died at the construction site of the new Palmeiras stadium.
- In Rio, the stadium which will host athletics in the 2016 Olympics has been closed for several months because of fears that its roof could collapse.

Blue flash over Montreal likely a meteor: Experts

But the sky is not falling. Fireball could have measured up to one metre in diameter, prof says

Don't panic, says Chris Hadfield — that was the Canadian astronaut's down-to-earth advice after many people tweeted they saw a blue flash and heard a thundering boom in the Montreal and Ottawa areas Tuesday night.

Two Ontario-based professors said Wednesday the phenomenon was likely a fireball, with one suggesting it was probably between the size of a baseball and a basketball when it passed through the atmosphere.

According to Hadfield, the former commander of the International Space Station, this isn't an unusual occurrence.

"Earth gets hit by 100 tons of meteorites every day," he said. "Once in a while we get a big rock that comes into the Earth's atmosphere and like in Montreal last night, it actually gets down low enough in the atmosphere to burn up as a blue flame and then make like a pressure wave that we hear as a sonic boom.

Both Paul Delaney, an astronomy expert at York University and Peter Brown, a physics professor at Western University in London, Ont., agreed there was likely a meteor strike.

"It's certainly consistent with the effect we would expect for a relatively good-sized fireball that might produce meteorites," Brown said.

Tuesday night's fireball was nothing like the meteor that crashed in Russia earlier this year, which was estimated to be about 10 tons. Hadfield admitted some space rocks can pose a threat to Earth. "It is one of the natural disasters that has happened repeatedly in the Earth's history."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Come snow or high water, he's going running

David Harwood, a graduate student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, checks his time as he runs in Troy, N.Y., during the first measurable snowfall of the season Tuesday.

J.S. CARRAS/THE TROY RECORD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Guilty plea

Fraud nets Sask. man year in jail

A man has been sentenced to a year in jail after admitting he swindled dozens of Saskatoon renters.

Jason Hartlen pleaded guilty to multiple counts of fraud and was ordered to pay $80,000 in restitution. THE CANADIAN PRESS/CKOM

Russian airport

$2.7M stolen in robbery: Cops

Russian police say armed men in camouflage outfits robbed a passenger at Sheremetyevo Airport of a bag reportedly holding $2.7 million. The passenger flew into the airport before dawn on Wednesday from Istanbul. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pianist acquitted

Noise-pollution charges dropped

A Spanish court has acquitted concert pianist Laia Martin, 28, on charges of causing noise pollution and psychological damage to a neighbour. The trial caused disbelief when prosecutors sought a sentence of seven years. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Australian court finds Toronto ballerina was killed by angry lover

In a fit of rage. Simon Gittany convicted of throwing Lisa Harnum to her death after discovering her plans to return to Canada

The day before Scarborough ballerina Lisa Harnum plunged to her death from a 15th-floor balcony in Australia, her mother pleaded with her to come home and escape her abusive lover.

Harnum, 30, a former student at Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate, planned to take that advice, but stayed one more day in her Sydney apartment with her fiancé, 40-year-old Simon Gittany.

Gittany was convicted of murder on Wednesday in a Sydney court as Harnum's mother, Joan, looked on, clutching a doll believed to have belonged to her daughter. Gittany's sentencing is scheduled for Feb. 5.

Justice Lucy McCallum accepted the prosecution's contention that Gittany threw his fiancée off their balcony on the morning of July 20, 2011, in a fit of rage after he discovered she planned to return to Canada.

Harnum was remembered as a gentle, positive person in an online tribute page by friends, including Alex Melconian, who knew her at Dr. Norman Bethune. In an interview, Melconian remembered her as "always very positive. She had a great smile."

After Harnum's mother heard the verdict, she told reporters the case is a "powerful wake-up call to young women — and to parents, siblings and friends of these women — to be aware of the warning signs of a controlling relationship and to take a proactive approach to assisting them."

Joan Harnum said there are no winners in this case and that "two families have had their lives dramatically changed forever."

On the morning of her death, Harnum had packed a suitcase and was trying to leave for home, but Gittany discovered her plans and dragged her back into their apartment, the court heard.

A hidden pinhole security camera in the apartment building showed Gittany grabbing Harnum and dragging her back into their apartment just 69 seconds before her death.

Another hidden camera in an elevator showed him apparently overcome by grief after Gittany fell to her death.

In his defence, Gittany painted his former partner as suicidal and said she "lost her footing" after climbing over the balcony's glass balustrade railing. He said he was attempting to pull her to safety when she fell, but police reported there were no fingerprints on the balustrade.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Remembering Lisa

"She loved to dance. She was a ballerina but not only a ballerina. (She loved) dancing in general. ... She cared a lot for people." Alex Melconian, friend of Lisa Harnum

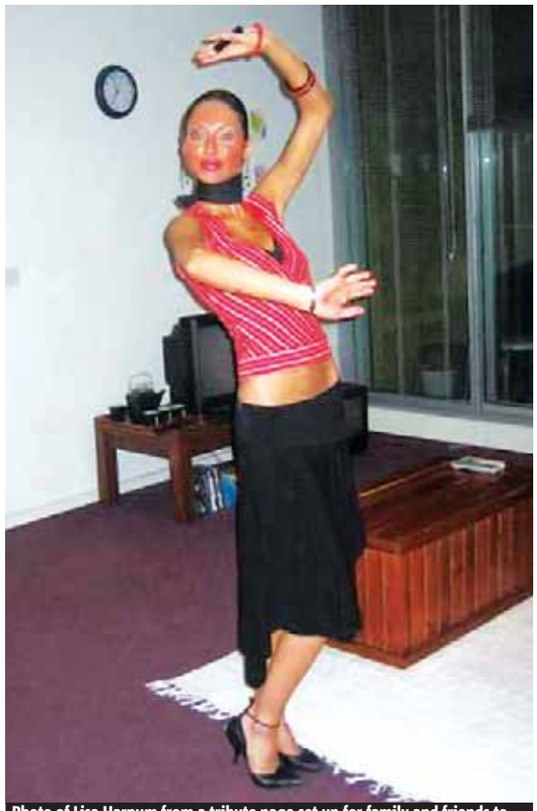

Photo of Lisa Harnum from a tribute page set up for family and friends to gather, share their memories and celebrate the life of Harnum. CONTRIBUTED

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TORONTO HYDRO'S 21st-CENTURY GRID

Consider for a moment the evolution of an electronic device that you're familiar with, such as a desktop computer. In the 1980s, home computers became commonplace — they were quite costly and we held on to them for a number of years. Now, a newer model of your desktop, laptop and hand-held device seems to be announced as soon as you've bought the latest. And if it's not a new model, then it's a software upgrade with some sort of improvement.

Now consider that electricity powers all of these gadgets. But it does so on equipment installed decades ago. Like the modern devices that we take for granted, our electricity infrastructure needs to be modernized, too.

Clearly, Toronto must have an electrical system that supports the adoption of new equipment and technologies. One that provides businesses, institutions and industry with the reliable supply of electricity needed to keep highly sensitive operating equipment running. Contributing to the economic prosperity of Toronto means having a power grid on which we can depend.

So, while we are making major infrastructure investments and replacing equipment when it reaches its "past due" date, we're also looking to add smart technologies, like transformer monitors, to our system. This would allow us to track the performance of our equipment and help us manage electrical power as it flows through our wires. These monitors would alert us to problems before they cause power failures, which would improve our service to you.

After all, outages caused by transformer failures can be lengthy; anywhere from six to 10 hours.

Avoiding a power failure in your neighbourhood is much more preferable than responding to a blackout. Replacing equipment before it fails is the key to good service reliability.

In an increasingly tech-savvy world, we know that you expect this level of service from us. Transformer monitors are one solution we're considering to improve our service to you.

Anthony Haines
Toronto Hydro Corporation
president and chief executive officer

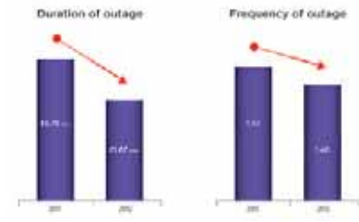
New technology at Ossington Avenue and Dundas Street West: Super what? Super cool. This "Super Sucker" truck is a new addition to the arsenal of tools for Toronto Hydro's contractor, Super Sucker. It makes round cuts into the sidewalk for new poles. No more jackhammers or dust, no more ripped up sidewalks, increasing cost efficiency and productivity, and the work area is neater, safer and back to normal for pedestrians much faster.

CONTRIBUTED

MEASURING UP

As a standard throughout the industry, Toronto Hydro evaluates service reliability through two main measures: System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI) and System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI). So if you want to know how long the average outage lasts, look at SAIDI (duration). And to understand how many times the lights go out, on average, look at SAIFI (frequency).

Looking at the 2012 data from the graph, you can see that, on average, each customer experienced 1.4 outages lasting a little more than one hour. Thanks, in part, to Toronto Hydro's investments, Toronto Hydro has improved reliability since 2011,



when customers experienced 1.6 outages on average lasting nearly 1.5 hours.

In reality, some customers may have experienced more outages for a longer time while others may not have experienced an outage at all. For simplicity, Toronto Hydro presents this information as an average across all of our customers.

For more information, please visit torontohydro.com/responsibility.

MAKING THE ELECTRICAL CONNECTION

Green energy, sustainable power and renewable resources — have you ever heard these terms and wondered what they really mean?

This terminology is used to describe electricity generated locally from resources like the sun, wind, water or biological sources. Renewable sources of generation have less impact on the environment.

It's Toronto Hydro's role to support and facilitate the connection of local generation to its grid. And since 2010, the company has connected more than 500 projects initiated by its customers.

In 2005, Toronto Hydro installed solar panels on its building at 500 Commissioners St. More than 2,200 solar panels generate up to 286 kilowatts of green electricity. That's enough electricity to power up as many as 17 homes. This installation is also good for the environment. It eliminates approximately 105 tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year.

If you have questions about connecting an electricity generation project, email Toronto Hydro's connection team at fit@torontohydro.com or visit torontohydro.com/feedintariff.

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Douglas Coupland

Douglas Coupland's latest novel, Worst. Person. Ever., is available from Random House Canada.

Day 19

metronews.ca/temp

Kitchen nightmares

There's no pay, but you can have all the abuse you want

Would you do a job where you weren't paid, were endlessly berated, forced to use dangerous equipment and denied proper medical help? Welcome to the life of a kitchen apprentice in the cutthroat culinary scene.

At times, it's like a real-life Kitchen Nightmares episode where even the most seasoned staff are berated to the point of tears.

"It is common for some cooks to be thrown under the bus by others because they don't want to look bad," one Toronto sous-chef explains of his early days in the industry.

IRENE KUAN/METRO

Seasonal work

Santa: The ultimate temp

Seasonal work as Santa pays up to $100 an hour, according to a PayScale survey. But all that non-stop cheeriness can take a toll. One Santa told the New York Post he wasn't able to leave his chair to go to the bathroom and got hit in the head with a frying pan by a scared child.

VAWN HIMMELSBACH/FOR METRO

Temp Hits an All-Time Low

Do you have a special place you go to when you're at an all-time low? Some people have a place, me I just drive and drive, past the strip malls, past the light industrial zones and past the fallow fields. After watching Kyle enter the refinery I began thinking of the world and how it's changed, even in my short life. Countries like Greece that used to be normal countries, now gutted of their middle class and overnight turned into something new and nameless, a land with no economy but with pretty good coffee and smoking hot Wi-Fi. I got to thinking of bubbles—how all we do these days is lurch from bubble to bubble. Are we in a new bubble? Is the bubble about to burst? I'm afraid of bubbles and I'm sick of bubbles—and yet I'm addicted to bubbles. Go figure.

I drove past the under-construction subdivisions that died in 2008, their 2x4s turned the grey colour of moths. I wondered if we're addicted to the idea that society without a middle class isn't really society. I wondered if maybe back in the days of Detroit, jumbo refrigerators and the Beatles we tricked ourselves into thinking that the middle class equals the future—and without a middle class we can't see pictures in our heads of what tomorrow might be. I find it strange how politicians repeat the words 'middle class' over and over and over again, as if doing so will allow us to pretend it still exists, that it's not evaporating daily like a puddle on a road.

Night came and I was anywhere and nowhere when my phone buzzed—it was Mr. Xu—he was back in town! And he had his big surprise all ready for me at his short-term corporate lodging suite. I couldn't remember the last time I was ever happier to get a text.

I drove to The Executive Privilege Short-Term Corporate Lodging, and ran to room 307 where the nerdy but lovely Mr. Xu awaited me.

"Ah, hello capitalist lapdog. You be ready for grand surprise?"

"Shut up! I can't believe you're back!" I gave him a smooch and said, "Okay, dial me in. I am ready for your big surprise, buster."

"Apologize in advance if not good enough."

I drove to The Executive Privilege Short-Term Corporate Lodging, and ran to room 307 where the nerdy but lovely Mr. Xu awaited me.

"Show me your surprise!"

"Very well."

A dropcloth concealed what was supposed to be the main living area. Mr. Xu pulled it back and I bathed in the majesty of what I saw.

He said, "Pretty kickass sexy, don't you think?"

I sucked in some breath and said, "Mr. Xu, you have truly amazed me."

Before me, in beautiful rows and shelves, lay over a thousand unique pairs of sneakers that would crash eBay in a flash if they all went up for sale at once.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Random fact of the day

- DiedInHouse.com supposedly scours millions of records to find out whether someone has died at a specific address. Real Estate agents hate it because a 'stigmatized property' can lose 10 to 15 per cent of its value.

SOURCE: OMG-FACTS.COM

Random biz fact of the day

21%

That's a lot of people lying: 21 per cent of resumés state fraudulent degrees

SOURCE: NEXCAREER

The clock is ticking

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION DAVID VAN DYKE/METRO

TEMP is ... well, temporary

Douglas Coupland's 20-day novella is a pop-up project and will disappear from our website this Monday at 12:01 a.m. EST. If you've missed an instalment, there are still four days to catch up at temp.metronews.ca — before it is gone forever.

METRO

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Shelve that Sriracha hoarding plan, for now

Don't sweat it.
Company says hot sauce supply is not in danger despite court ruling

A judge has ordered a plant that produces the popular Sriracha chili sauce to stop emitting annoying odours.

Judge Robert H. O'Brien on Tuesday ruled in favour of the city of Irwindale, Calif., where Sriracha recently relocated, saying sauce maker Huy Fong Foods must stop any operations that could be causing the odours and make unspecified changes to mitigate them.

The company had no immediate comment.

The company has said there is no reason to close the plant now because harvest season and the subsequent grinding of red-hot jalapeno peppers — the key ingredient of the sauce — have passed.

As a result, the injunction might not have an immediate impact on the company's production or the nation's hot sauce supply as Huy Fong continues its year-round mixing and bottling. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Some not so hot on smell

"Why are people complaining about the chili smell?"

Randall Acosta, 45, who lives in an apartment complex across the street from the factory, said the scent can be strong sometimes but it makes him hungry.

Don't sweat it: There's no Sriracha shortage, yet. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Random biz fact of the day

16%

There has been a 16 per cent growth in part-time positions, year over year.
WORKOPOLIS

A range of firms are hiring more part-time workers these days. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Market Minute

DOLLAR 94.38¢ (-0.59¢)

TSX 13,362.06 (+12.29)

OIL $92.30 US (-$1.38)

GOLD $1,237.80 US (-$3.60)

Natural gas: $3.91 US (+3¢)
Dow Jones: 16,072.33 (+24.53)

Focus on commerce

Pushing 'economic diplomacy' top priority for Canada

The Harper government says it wants Canadian diplomats in foreign countries to re-channel their energies and resources into advancing the country's commercial interests.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Home mortgages

Consider phasing out CMHC insurance: IMF

Ottawa should consider phasing out insuring home mortgage through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., the International Monetary Fund said Wednesday.

Such a recommendation, surprising from an international financial organization, appears to side with Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, who has recently questioned whether the federal government should be in the business of insuring higher-risk mortgages at all.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Xbox One, PS4 glitches test gamers' devotion

Gamers are, um, passionate about their consoles. Emanuel Jumatate hugs his new Xbox One after he purchased it last Friday. NAM Y. HUH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Move over, zombies. Step aside, terrorists. Aliens, out of the way.

There are a few new foes affecting gamers that are proving to be far more destructive than any on-screen villain.

With nicknames like "the blue light of death" and "the disc drive of doom," they're the game-ending glitches causing headaches for a few gamers who picked up the next-generation Xbox One and PlayStation 4 consoles at launch.

Microsoft Corp. said Monday it's replacing the Xbox One units of users who have reported systems that won't read discs, an issue dubbed "the disc drive of doom." The company said the problem is affecting "a very small number" of customers, who will also receive one free downloadable game from Microsoft Game Studios.

Sony Corp. announced after the debut of the PS4 earlier this month that it was replacing the units for "less than 1 per cent" of users whose new consoles malfunctioned and displayed a pulsating blue light. The problem was given the moniker "the blue light of death."

While the issues seem to affect a minority of Xbox One and PS4 owners, the concerns could deter consumers who regularly play games on smartphones and mobile devices. Sony's PS4 costs $399 US. Microsoft's Xbox One cost $100 US more and includes a Kinect sensor.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Costly error

The glitches recall Microsoft's "red ring of death," when production problems caused several predecessors of the Xbox One to lock up and display three flashing red lights.

- Microsoft extended customers' warranties and said in 2007 that it had spent more than $1 billion US to repair the problems with the Xbox 360.

BLACK FRIDAY
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*See page 42 for more details
H&M

Stores fight the lure of shopping in your pyjamas

Click, click, click.
Brick-and-mortar outlets are in a battle with Amazon during this crucial shopping period

This holiday shopping season, it's Amazon vs. everyone else.

The online giant has attracted customers from big store chains like Walmart and Best Buy with low prices and convenient shipping. Now, stores are fighting to get customers back during the busiest shopping period of the year.

Stores are doing things like matching the lower prices on Amazon.com and offering the same discounts in stores as on their websites. For its part, Amazon is giving customers the option to pick up items at physical locations and adding Sunday delivery.

This Amazon.com shipping and receiving facility looks ready for battle.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

The two sides are dueling over shoppers like Jessica Danielle, a speechwriter who plans to do the bulk of her gift shopping on Amazon. "All the time spent going to brick-and-mortar stores, is it worth my time?" said Danielle. "I don't think so."

There's a lot at stake for both sides. Amazon has built a following, but wants to grow its business globally. Meanwhile, brick-and-mortar retailers struggle to keep shoppers from using their stores as showrooms to test out and try on items before buying them for less on Amazon.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A head above the rest

Andy Scott stands with Clydesdale horses Duke and Baron and Donna Auchinvole during a topping out ceremony at The Kelpies on Wednesday in Falkirk, Scotland. Construction work has been completed on Scott's Kelpies, the world's largest pair of equine sculptures and one of the U.K.'s tallest pieces of public art. JEFF J MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES

AA-US Airways merger

World's largest airline cleared for takeoff by judge

A federal bankruptcy judge has cleared the way for American Airlines and US Airways to close their merger and create the world's largest airline.

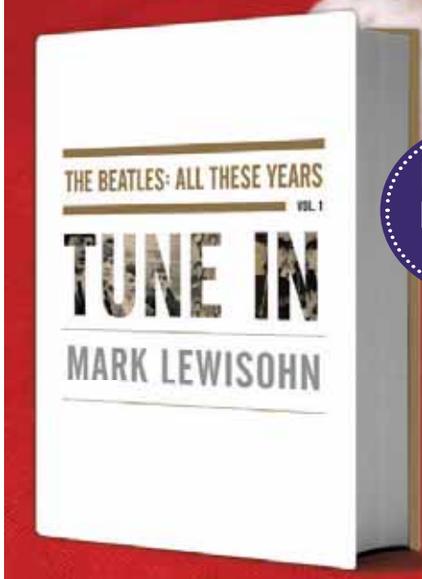
The judge ruled Wednesday that this month's settlement of an antitrust lawsuit filed by the federal government didn't upset American's bankruptcy-reorganization plan, which is built around the merger. He rejected a request by a group of consumers to block the deal temporarily.

American said immediately after the ruling that it plans to complete the merger on Dec. 9.

The Justice Department had sued to block the deal in August, saying that it would hurt competition and lead to higher prices. But regulators settled their case in exchange for the airlines' promise to surrender some coveted landing rights.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

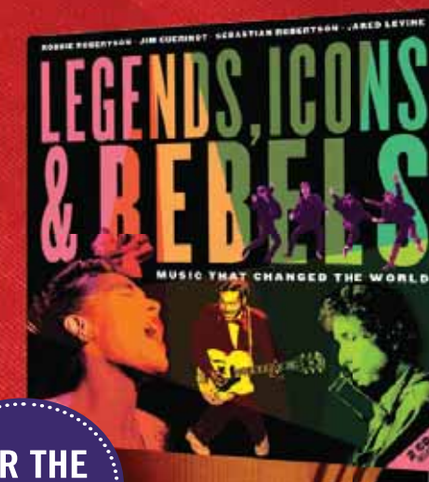
CHART-TOPPING GIFTS
FOR THE MUSIC LOVER



FOR THE BEATLES NERD

Tune In is the first volume of *All These Years*—a highly-anticipated, groundbreaking biographical trilogy **by the world's leading Beatles historian.**

A select history of rock with insights from Robbie Robertson (The Band), two CDs full of legendary tracks, and beautiful art – from Ella to Billie and Sinatra to Dylan, **explore the music that changed the world!**



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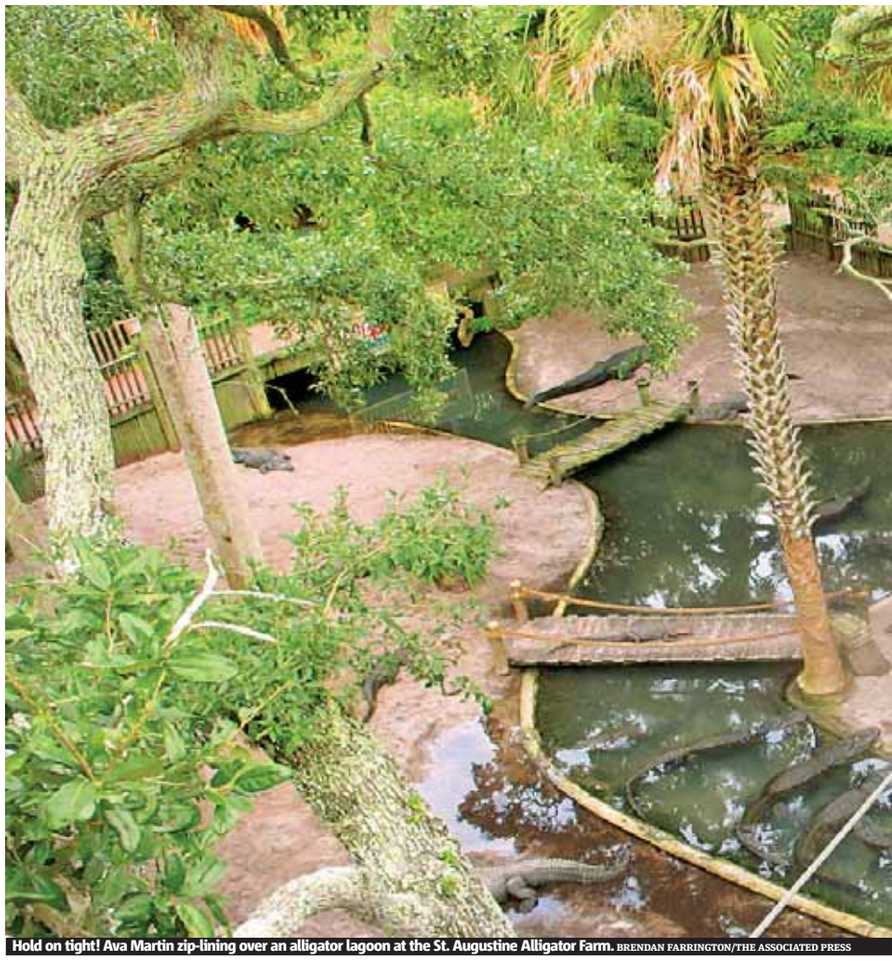

Hold on tight! Ava Martin zip-lining over an alligator lagoon at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. BRENDAN FARRINGTON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FEAR FACTOR

Take a ride on the wild side. One of Florida's oldest tourist attractions brings in adrenaline junkies with obstacle course

Quoted

"The most amazing, awesome thing I've done ever."

Ava Martin, 53, who lives just north of St. Augustine. She and her 21-year-old son Corey were taking the course for the second time.

I was slowly crossing a swinging log bridge when I paused, sensing the alligator 12 feet below was staring at me.

The water around the 8-foot gator's enormous body began rippling rapidly. A second later, Big Al let out a deep bellow, as if to say, "If you fall, you're my lunch."

I was grateful to be strapped in a harness.

The bridge was part of a 49-station obstacle course that includes 10 zip lines at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. It takes visitors over crocodiles, lemurs, giant tortoises, vultures and, of course, lots of alligators.

"It's just a totally different perspective. You can go to any zoo in the world and look at them through the glass, but you can't go anywhere and look at them over the top of the enclosures like you can here," said Scott Brown, who designed and now manages the Crocodile Crossing at the zoo.

The alligator farm is fascinating enough on foot. At 120 years old, it's one of Florida's oldest tourist attractions and it is the only zoo in the world that displays all 23 crocodilian species, including the nearly extinct Philippine crocodile.

From above, it's even

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AT THE ZOO

more amazing. I paused on a rope bridge to watch enormous African vultures rip apart a carcass, zipped over a lagoon with dozens of alligators, watched lemurs scrambling around their cage below me and saw the surprised faces of the guests on the ground as I flew over their heads.

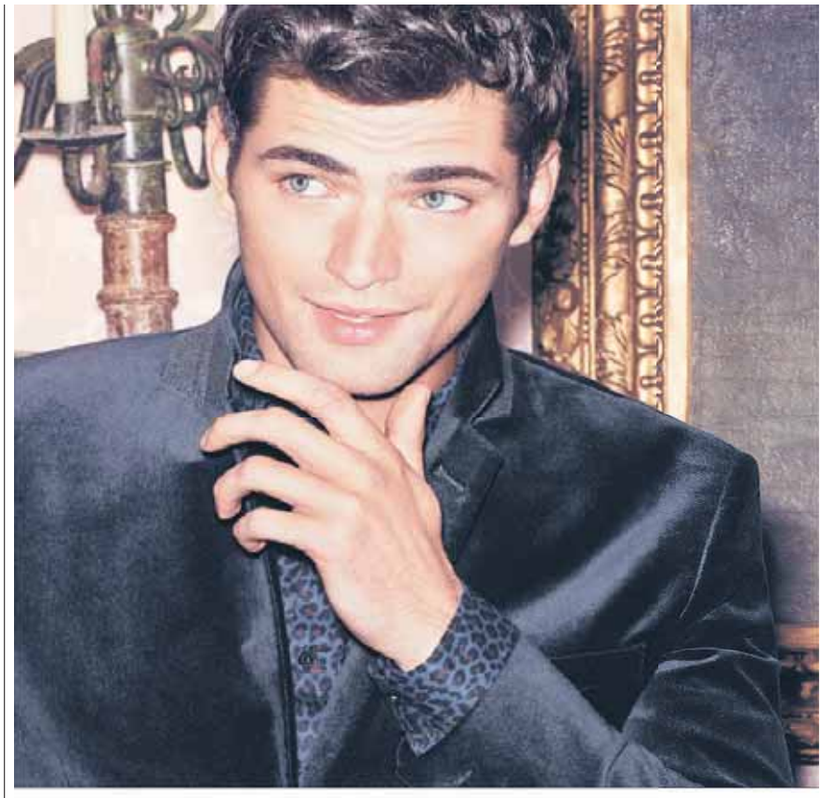
And it's a good workout. I've zip-lined through the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts and found this to be a bigger challenge. The zip lines in the mountains might be longer and faster, but the obstacles at the St. Augustine zoo make you work harder.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Highlights

The longest zip-line on the course is 300 feet, or the length of a football field. There are some very fast lines, requiring some quick breaking. There's also the occasional palm frond that harmlessly whacks your butt.

- "You'll see things that the public doesn't get to see," said Brown. "Whether it's other animal enclosures, animals getting moved, animals getting a vet visit, maybe getting blood drawn. And it's always exciting for the public to see a large alligator or even a small alligator getting caught, getting taped up and getting moved. You're always going to see something that nobody else is looking at."
- The course is a do-it-yourself adventure. Guests are given instructions at the beginning on how to clip and unclip themselves to safety lines. A guide then follows on the ground and makes sure they're following safety rules, while at the same time providing facts about the animals they're seeing.



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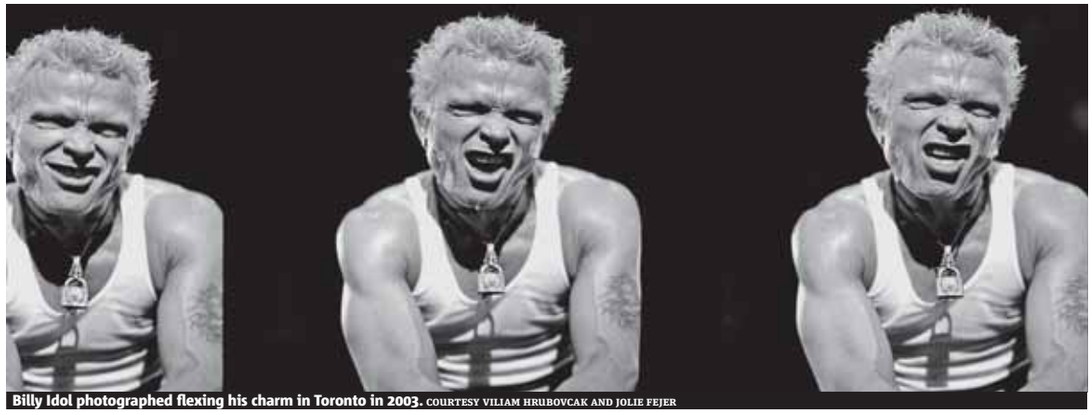

Billy Idol photographed flexing his charm in Toronto in 2003. COURTESY VILIAM HRUBOVCAK AND JOLIE FEJER

Peel Art Gallery.
One Offs exhibit in Brampton features portraits of rock rebels

One Offs, currently on exhibit at the Peel Art Gallery and Museum Archives in Brampton features revealing portraits of some of the original instigators of the punk rock movement.

The series, begun in 1980 by Toronto photographer Viliam Hrubovcak, became a shared passion when he met and married Jolie Fejer, after an auspicious introduction by David Johansen, lead singer for The New York Dolls.

Most of the images in the exhibition have never been displayed in public. The portraits, mostly shot on black and white film in Toronto, celebrate the talent that passed through the city.

The One Offs exhibit at the PAMA runs until Jan. 5.

METRO

Lou Reed

Viliam Hrubovcak photographed Lou Reed on the film set of September Songs: The Kurt Weill Story in Toronto in 1994.

- While working on a movie set, Hrubovcak overheard a makeup artist mention that a movie with the Velvet Underground singer was currently being filmed in Toronto. Hrubovcak contacted the director, presented his portfolio and was granted access to the set.

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TIPS ON (COUGH) HACKING A COLD

HE SAYS

John Mazerolle
metronews.ca

Don't you hate when co-workers get over-detailed when describing their colds?

For instance, I've got a cold that started with a throat so sore that ice cream went down like broken glass and broken glass went down like jagged steel. Then it morphed into a sinus headache that I'm sure — any scientist reading can back me up — involved a small, angry man inside my head moshing to Shipping Up to Boston. And now it's the sneezy stage where I'm moulding a mound of used tissues into the mountain from Close Encounters of the Third Kind in the hopes that aliens will take me to a planet where the common cold has been defeated.

Who needs to hear that level of detail? Nobody.

Fortunately, my co-workers haven't had to worry about it because I've been on my couch for two days wishing I had a girlfriend who would come coddle me and/or kill me with an axe.

I've stayed home because I'm not one of those office heroes who somehow believes they contribute while laying comatose at their keyboard, occasionally blowing their nose with the mouse pad. I figure my one-day absence has less impact than a particularly diverting Google doodle spreading throughout the newsroom.

During my down time, I've been reading how to avoid office colds. So in the fine tradition of has-been goaltenders telling current NHLers what they're doing wrong, or failed politicians explaining how to get elected, here are my tips on avoiding office illness:

Quitting Colds, Turkey: A Guide to Office Health

- Hand sanitizer is a misnomer, and can be used all over your body. Stepping under the wall dispenser and acting out a Miley Cyrus video until you're saturated head to toe will keep you disinfected AND keep your co-workers at a good distance for the rest of the day. Win-win.
- Licking your workspace clean hurts as much as it helps.
- Remember that Vitamin C only works in conjunction with magnetic bracelets, garlic, echinacea and, sure, why not, Reiki.
- Though many people use sanitizing sprays, remember nothing gets your keyboard clean like dropping it into a bucket of water.
- Keep your hands clenched as fists so that every time you touch your face you punch yourself.
- A large hamster ball is probably not a practical way to cordon yourself off from co-workers, but it would be awesome.
- Remember that in the bathroom, a 15-second, hot-water scrub is absolutely necessary when somebody is watching. If you think you're alone, waving your hands under lukewarm water for a second is fine. If the only other person is in a stall, just running the water is often enough to complete the illusion.
- Cough in the face of people who are already sick, because what's the harm?

And those are my tips. I hope you found them helpful, particularly my co-workers, because I'm coming in today. Sorry. On the upside, you're not going to hear any details about my cold. Cough, cough, ahem.

ZOOM

Here, let me give you an arm with that

COURTESY DYSON

Man and machine get a little cosier

Think super-human strength is reserved for the big screen?

A team of engineers are encouraging you to think again after they developed the Titan Arm — a battery-powered robotic arm that gives users an extra 40 pounds in strength, and functions to rehabilitate those with back injuries by helping them to rebuild muscle and motor control. METRO

Dyson award winner

- The arm recently won the 2013 James Dyson Award, beating out 650 other projects from around the world.
- The team wins $45,000 to help commercialize their idea, with an additional $15,000 going to their school.
- jamesdysonaward.org

Inexpensive design

"Titan Arm is obviously an ingenious design, but the team's use of modern, rapid — and relatively inexpensive — manufacturing techniques makes the project even more compelling."

James Dyson said of the $2,000 prototype, which is significantly less than similar exoskeletons that run $100,000.

Tech advances make life easier

A team of four University of Pennsylvania mechanical engineering students spent eight months creating it.

The arm's shoulder is made of three joints that mimic the rotation of a human elbow, allowing for free range of use.

Plus it contains sensors that track motion and relay data to doctors for remote prognosis. METRO

Clickbait

HANNAH ZITNER
hannah.zitner@metronews.ca

With Wi-Fi popping up everywhere from underground subways to in-flight planes, there's more reason to put your apps to work. Once the domain of cash-strapped students, texting over Wi-Fi's been gaining popular ground (cause who doesn't like saving money on their phone bills?). Before your next flight or trip underground, give these a try.

CONTRIBUTED

WhatsApp:
Works on Apple or Android phones, WhatsApp is among the most popular and lets you send texts (including pictures) to your other 'whatsApp friends.' Only downside is, you have to convince all your pals to get the app, too.

Viber:
Similar to WhatsApp, but lets you send audio, video and even make VoIP calls, too. Perfect for long distance pals.

Zipaclip:
For those who need a little more bandwidth for their texting needs, Zipaclip (as it sounds), lets you zip videos up to five minutes long, so you're no longer restricted to texting 30 second videos. Also, keeps them secure. Just in case.

Twitter

@metropicks asked: @thehappycity book says urban design that fosters social ties makes for a happy city. What makes your city a happy one?

@Canucklehead_ca: An ample supply of beer and .... umm, I .... I'll have to get back to you on this.

@Lowpass: being able to walk everywhere and the restaurants, bars and other venues that come with that.

Follow @metropicks and take part in our daily poll.

Comments

RE: When A Stalker Strikes Online, published Nov. 26

I'm appalled the police can't do anything faster or sooner. Can't believe what this poor woman has been through, first with her brother's suicide and now this. It's just awful. This stalker should be prosecuted so they can't follow through with their threats.
KH posted to metronews.ca

Hiding behind a computer to threaten someone shows you're a real wimp, pretty pathetic and probably a low life. **turtles have a say posted to metronews.ca**

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Local brew and unsigned bands

Indie spirit. Steam Whistle knows what it's like to play against the big guys — so they give bands a big break

BACKSTAGE PASS
Ian Gormely
scene@metronews.ca

Rituals will be one of the unsigned acts playing at Steam Whistle Unsigned at the Steam Whistle Brewery in Toronto on Friday. CONTRIBUTED

While we've known it for years, the rest of the world is finally catching on to an undisputable fact: Toronto is the best music city in the world.

Locals like Drake continue to set the pop-music agenda, but where does that leave a young, unknown band?

Enter Steam Whistle Brewery's Unsigned concert series, a semi-regular showcase of up-and-coming talent in the city. All proceeds are donated to charity.

"Canada's had such a fantastic musical renaissance," says Matt Weed, the series' co-founder. "We thought it would be great to bring some of the amazing Canadian music and give it a home."

Weed organized the first Unsigned show back in 2007. "Beer and music are intrinsically linked," he says.

As an independent brewery in a country dominated by a couple of big players, Steam Whistle was "looking to support like-minded people in a different sphere."

Independent musicians seemed like a perfect fit.

"Steam Whistle has a good reputation for supporting the arts," confirms Adam Seward, singer-guitarist for local post-punk band Rituals, who play Unsigned Friday night.

Besides offering bands a place to play, he says, the venue's sound system offers more aural nuance than your typical cramped club gig and the series attracts fans who wouldn't necessarily seek out a band like Rituals on their own.

"It's not just our friends."

Six-and-a-half years and nearly 100 bands later, Unsigned is a resounding success.

Among the groups showcased, says Weed, are artists like the Darcys and Austra who were signed to prominent indie labels shortly after their Steam Whistle gig.

But Weed maintains it's the live experience the bands create that drives the series.

"Going out with a bunch of your friends, having a beer and listening to some great music is something that you can't download."

Steam Whistle Unsigned #27: Rituals, the oOohh Baby Gimme Mores and Fresh Snow — Friday night at the Steam Whistle Brewery, 255 Bremner Blvd. $5. Doors at 8 p.m.

Need to know

The series is called Unsigned, but there are no hard and fast rules for who can and can't play at the brewery.

"The concept of signed has changed drastically," says Weed. Instead he works by what he calls "the unofficial rule of three:" he's read about them in the press, heard about them from someone else, or seen them play himself.

"We wanted to go after musicians that are trying to do something new and original," he says. "This is the sort of music that we like to go out and see."

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Kate Bosworth takes on challenge of playing drug-addicted mom

Stripped down. In Homefront, Bosworth wanted to show vulnerability, not just a villain

NED EHRBAR
Metro World News in Hollywood

Kate Bosworth wasn't going to take the easy route in approaching her character for Homefront. She co-stars as a meth-addicted mom who sets her loose-cannon brother (James Franco) after Jason Statham's retired DEA agent after their kids get into a schoolyard brawl.

On a happier note, Bosworth got hitched this summer to filmmaker Michael Polish, and she couldn't be more satisfied with their home life.

The last time we spoke, we talked a lot about working as a producer as well as an actress to get projects going. How has that been going?
Well, I produced a wedding (laughs). Joking aside, I mean my life changed when I met my husband because he's a filmmaker, so our life is a constant production of films, and he also shoots a lot of my campaigns involved with the fashion side of things that I design. He sees the product that I've designed and he thinks about what that campaign will look like and what the films will look like for it. So it's a continual creative household. When you have your partner, it's a fast track to things.

In Homefront, you're playing a fairly complex character who's actually a fully rounded human being, which you don't see a lot in action fare.
That was the challenge. I get asked a lot if the challenge was the physicality, and I didn't think twice about portraying someone and being truthful to how she would look. That strip-down was something that was required by the character and how she behaves and the abuse that she does to herself. The challenge for me was to maintain her dignity throughout the movie and not strip her of it even when she's unsympathetic and selfish and has terrible behaviour. I know James kind of approached his "villain" character similarly in that when we were standing in front of each other it wasn't "the villain and the drug addict," it was a sister and a brother. There's that vulnerability that was really important to both of us for the characters, even though they do despicable things.

Kate Bosworth as Cassie Klum and James Franco as Gator in Homefront. COURTESY MCT

Well, she is a drug addict.
Sure, but there's an easy pitfall to say, "She's a drug addict, oh well." There's this kind of face value that you can easily fall into. The challenge was to make sure that the human side to her was present at all times as well as the drugs.

You have that great moment when she realizes the enormity of the events she's set in motion. It starts off almost like a PTA squabble.
Of course (laughs). I figured that she comes in there every Monday with a problem. She's an exposed nerve, so anything that rubs up against her — depending on how much she's been using and how much she has left — it's going to effect her behaviour with people, and it normally would be explosive. Unless she's with her brother. Her brother and her kid are the two people that I thought that she quiets down with.

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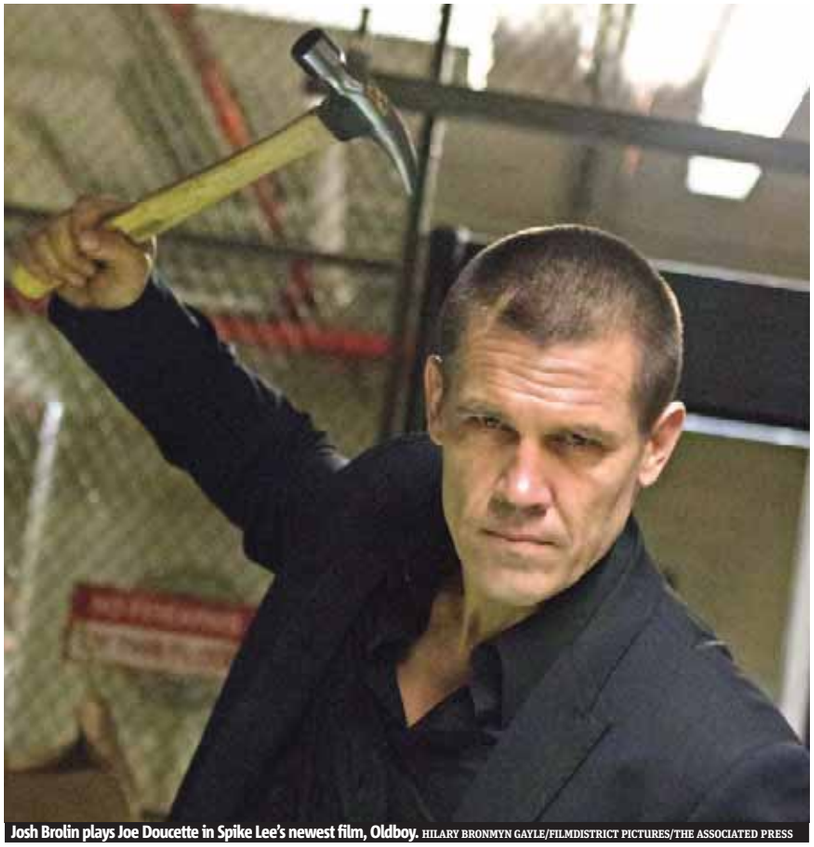

Josh Brolin plays Joe Doucette in Spike Lee's newest film, Oldboy. HILARY BRONMYN GAYLE/FILMDISTRICT PICTURES/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Brolin's a tough guy on and off the screen

Gulp. Oldboy star gained 28 pounds in 10 days, then lost it all again for role in gritty thriller

NED EHRBAR
Metro World News in Hollywood

The catering staff at the press junket for Spike Lee's update on Oldboy has laid out a spread almost entirely made up of different kinds of dumplings, and Josh Brolin does not think that's very funny. (The dish is featured prominently in the film as one of the only things Brolin's character is allowed to eat during his mysterious 20-year imprisonment.) "I ate, I'd say, probably 200 dumplings or something like that," he says.

Oldboy asked a lot of Brolin's body in that his character goes from a bloated alcoholic to a lean and mean tool of vengeance after his imprisonment. Of course, he didn't have 20 years to pull off the transition. "It was more about water retention, so I gained 28 pounds in 10 days, and then I lost 22 pounds in two and a half days. And then going through that and all the cramps of that, I was rehearsing the fight at the same time, which was not smart. So I pulled a lot of muscles and stuff that I'm still dealing with now."

That fight he's talking about is quite a doozy, an update on the original Korean film's single-take tracking shot of the film's hero taking out an army of goons with just his bare hands and a carefully deployed hammer. So obviously for the remake they had to up the ante a bit.

"That was five weeks of prep, and it was difficult, to say the least," Brolin says. "The fight, I think, is at least three times longer than the original fight. I was having a really tough time in the beginning, and then I panicked. And then I started working out a lot — like two hours in the morning and two hours at night between 12-hour days. So I wasn't sleeping a lot, which I think lent to the movie, too, because I was more emotional, I was more on edge, I felt more exposed, vulnerable, whatever."

That level of self-abuse paid off, apparently. "We did it in seven takes, and the seventh take was the one," he remembers. "I walked away after that and had a little moment to myself, had some tears and was just happy that a 45-year-old dude was able to pull that off. It was a geriatric moment that I had."

Worth the pain?

"I'll never do it again because it killed my body."

Josh Brolin
On losing weight while training for fight scenes in Oldboy

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While my guitar gently weeps: Book shows off rock 'n' roll's tear-jerkers

Call her Baby. 108 Rock Star Guitars book celebrates beloved instruments and their battle-axe beauty

Sometimes, a picture is worth a thousand songs.

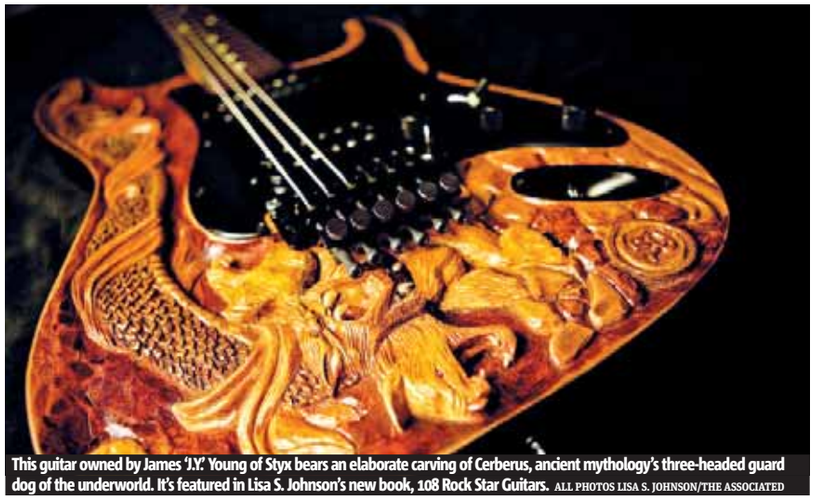
The supersized book 108 Rock Star Guitars (Glitterati Inc.) demonstrates that six-stringed instruments owned by celebrities and virtuoso sidemen can look as good as they rock. The 17-year undertaking by photographer Lisa S. Johnson partly benefits the Les Paul Foundation. Paul, the Rock Hall musician-inventor, wrote the foreword before he died.

Not a guitar geek? Don't fret.

Whether you define "pickup" as a truck, a dating technique or a guitar part, you can revel in the glitz-and-grit world where these prized possessions reside. The instruments (one's named Baby) evoke tender talk from macho musicians. But some of these battle-axe beauties have seen more action than a roller derby queen: They bear the gashes and sweat stains to prove it.

The author, who grew up in a musical family, underscores musicians' emotional attachment to their instruments. "I don't believe any serious musician feels that his instrument is an inanimate object," Tom Scholz of the group Boston tells Johnson.

Steve Vai, who went solo after playing with Frank Zappa's band, once described his guitar as "the voice of my heart" in moments of depression, euphoria and "divine love. ... I have cried, screamed, prayed and bled through that instrument."



This guitar owned by James 'J.Y.' Young of Styx bears an elaborate carving of Cerberus, ancient mythology's three-headed guard dog of the underworld. It's featured in Lisa S. Johnson's new book, 108 Rock Star Guitars. ALL PHOTOS LISA S. JOHNSON/THE ASSOCIATED

The book lauds the instrument-makers, called luthiers, and the techs, along with the guitars.

Pawnshop wallflowers blossom into unbridled stardom. There are kaleidoscopic, patriotic and wildcat patterns; gorgeous maple and mahogany; and delicate carvings of leaves and acorns.

Some seem to revel in musical masochism, like Slash of Guns N' Roses' cigarette carelessness. As the story goes, the guitarist was "one with the music" while accidentally inflicting a "charred reminder of rock 'n' roll nirvana" on his guitar.

John Rzeznik (Goo Goo Dolls) resurrected a broken Stratocaster into a 4-string. The word "OUCH!" is splayed over its torso; it's now named Halfcaster.

"I was amazed when I threw the guitar in the air and the top portion split right off," Rzeznik recalled via email. "I had my guitar tech take it to a luthier in L.A. who sanded off the rough edges and fixed the electronics.

"I used it on a song called Big Machine for a couple years after that. Surprisingly, the tone didn't really change; it was a cheap guitar that didn't sound that great to begin with. Ha ha!"

The appreciation of instruments as visual art is an age-old concept. They "may evoke status, identity, or indicate events — sacred or profane," comments J. Kenneth Moore, the Frederick P. Rose curator in charge of the Department of Musical Instruments at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. "They become sounding, tangible works of art — telling many stories of the life and times of those who used them," he said.

When Mom made young Nils Lofgren a Nehru jacket and bell-bottom pants out of drapes, he proudly stuck leftover fabric on his guitar so it matched his new suit.

The book also features a famous, battered Fender Esquire owned by Lofgren's boss, Bruce Springsteen.

Willie Nelson's Trigger, named for movie-cowboy Roy Rogers' horse, bears dozens of autographs, including Leon Russell, Roger Miller, Kris Kristofferson, Gene Autry, Waylon Jennings and Johnny Cash. Trigger's top is worn clear through; Nelson chooses to leave it that way. "The two of them," notes the book, "continue to mature together." Life partners in perfect harmony.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ticket to rock 'n' roll heaven

Activist-musician Tom Morello (Rage Against the Machine) scrawled jarring jargon over drawings of happy hippos on his axe.

Willie Nelson's guitar, Trigger, has a hole worn through it, and is inscribed with dozens of autographs.

ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons' guitar is covered with fake fur.

John Rzeznik of the Goo Goo Dolls resurrected a broken Stratocaster into a 4-string, named Halfcaster

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SEE WHAT'S NEW... CHECK OUT OUR LATEST OFFER ON PAGE 53 SHOPPERS DRUG MART

Steve Coogan on ratings, cynicism and the truth

Philomena opens next Friday. CONTRIBUTED

Philomena. Actor talks about journalism and his MPAA struggles

NED EHRBAR
Metro World News in Hollywood

Steve Coogan has been enjoying near-universal positive reception for Philomena, the true-life tale he co-wrote, produced and stars in with Judi Dench about a woman trying to track down the baby a group of nuns forced her to give up as a teen. But that adulation train hit a snag in the U.S., where the film was initially given an R-rating by the MPAA for two instances of the F-word. We spoke with Coogan just hours after that decision was reversed.

Congratulations on your MPAA victory.
They reversed their decision after we appealed, and I was there as a producer of the film putting the case for reappraising the rating. It was myself and Bert Fields — he's one of the hotshot Hollywood lawyers. ... They listened to our arguments and we convinced a two-thirds majority, which is what's required amongst the panel of people who can challenge the original rating.

Has your opinion of journalists changed at all after playing one in this?
My opinion of journalists was never bad. That's a myth put about by some journalists trying to undermine me, and it's kind of a part of a campaign by certain journalists who have an agenda to be reductive about the whole thing and make it that I don't. When actually in fact I love journalists. I admire journalists who plow through a lot of crap to get to the truth. But there are some journalists who are not really interested in the truth. They're just interested in shifting units and getting a pat on the back from their editors who just want to sell units to satisfy proprietors who want to satisfy shareholders, and it's not really anything to do with getting to the truth. Those are the people that I've got an issue with. People who have no ethics, basically.

So, cynics?
I think a lot of people end up being cynical, whereas in their heart they don't want to be cynical but they just wind up being cynical because they've been doing it so long and they're kind of battle-weary, I suppose. So I wanted Martin to have a humanity about him and have his cynicism challenged by this very ordinary — in some ways extraordinary but in other ways quite ordinary — old lady.

I was curious, at this point in your career, how often do people ask you to do impressions and how annoying do you find that?
People actually stopped asking me about it for years because I stopped doing them about 20 years ago because I didn't like doing them. I started out doing stand-up comedy, where I did lots of impersonations, 25 years ago. But then I moved away from it and then it became that people didn't know I did them. Then I'd start saying, "Hey, I can do some impersonations…" It became a party trick. I much prefer it as a party trick rather than as a career. I mean, I know Kevin Spacey does lots of impersonations but people don't think, "Oh, Kevin Spacey, the famous impressionist." (laughs)

He does a great Jack Lemmon.
You know what? I don't do a bad Jack Lemmon. I'll have to hear his and try mine.

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Adriana Leon competing at the
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Action Images / Paul Harding

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J.J. Abrams: Director, producer and now, novelist

Jack of all trades.
Director's first novel, S., is more than just your typical book

EMILY LAURENCE
Metro World News

J.J. Abrams' S. tells two parallel stories at once. GETTY IMAGES

When J.J. Abrams conceived the idea for S., he knew there was only one way to tell the story — and it wasn't on-screen. There would be no special effects or big-name actors. Abrams felt that the only medium that would work was a good old-fashioned book.

"It all started in LAX when J.J. found a paperback book," co-author Doug Dorst tells Metro. "Someone had written a note to whoever was going to find it." The note got the gears in Abrams' brain turning, and he came up with the idea of telling a story within a story.

S. is not your average book. The pages look old and worn, with scribbles all over the margins. There are inserts of photos, postcards and letters tucked into the pages. It's presented as a novel called Ship of Theseus written by V.M. Straka. But the notes and inserts tell another story, between a female college senior and a male graduate student who pass the book back and forth, leaving notes to each other.

Since writing a novel is a bit different from writing a script and Abrams was, you know, busy, he enlisted the help of acclaimed writer Dorst. "We spent the better part of a year talking about the characters, why they would pass the book back and forth to each other and the context of the notes," Dorst says. "Abrams told me, 'Go, run with it.'" Dorst would pass each chapter off to Abrams, who would then weigh in.

Telling two parallel stories with all the extras was no easy task. "There's a ridiculous amount of detail in the book," he says. "I didn't actually have a great system of keeping track of it. It was a lot of scribbled notes and keeping a lot of it in my head, which is not the most efficient way to work."

Despite not having everything figured out, Abrams and Dorst were on the same page (metaphorically speaking) the entire time. Though Abrams is familiar with screenwriting, where everything is mapped out beforehand, he adapted to the novel-writing process, letting the story unfold as it was being written.

So, are Abrams and Dorst hoping their book will inspire people to forgo their Kindles and go back to buying hardbacks? "I just want people to read!" Dorst laments. "I don't think one form has to win out over the other."

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Alec Baldwin

Baldwin loses his talk show but is still 'half' defiant over anti-gay slurs

Alec Baldwin has lost his talk show, which was officially cancelled by MSNBC in the wake of multiple controversies involving the former 30 Rock star, but Baldwin is still looking to set the record straight about what he may or may not have said to a photographer when he used an anti-gay slur. "I dispute half the comment I made," Baldwin tells the website Gothamist. "'F—t' is not the word that came out of my mouth. That I know. But you've got the fundamentalist wing of gay advocacy — (GLAAD communications VP) Rich Ferraro and (blogger) Andrew Sullivan — they're out there, they've got you. Rich Ferraro, this is probably one of his greatest triumphs. They killed my show. And I have to take some responsibility for that myself."

Jennifer Love Hewitt

Hewitt's baby-marriage double kept on down low

Jennifer Love Hewitt likes to keep things quiet. The former Ghost Whisperer star gave birth to a daughter, Autumn James Hallisay, on Tuesday, and her rep used the birth announcement to sneak in the fact that Hewitt has also quietly married fiancé Brian Hallisay. "Jennifer Love Hewitt and her husband, Brian Hallisay, are thrilled to announce the birth of their daughter," her rep tells Us Weekly.

METRO DISH

OUR TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

The Word

Thanksgiving holiday conversations: The celebrity version

THE WORD
Dorothy Robinson
scene@metronews.ca

What do the rich and famous do over the American Thanksgiving break? I have a feeling they are doing something fabulous and not doing what we do — hanging out in the townie bars in our hometown drinking cheap domestics with people from high school.

However, what if they did? For this special edition of The Word, Metro staffers imagined what kind of discussions the rich and famous have at their hometown hangs.

"Oh ... Kelly and Michelle ... Hi! Um, how long have you guys been bartending here?" **— Beyoncé**

"So, do you text?" **— Anthony Weiner**

"I don't know, y'all. Have I made enough of a statement this year that I am finally a woman?" **— Miley Cyrus**

"Guys, I know it's not like me to walk away from a fight, but if I get nabbed one more time for beating somebody up, I'll go away for a long time. Now, let's just chill, get another pitcher of Miller Lite and play some Keno." **— Chris Brown**

"Oh man, bro, last time I saw you, we were, what, in middle school? Can't believe it's been five years!" **— Justin Bieber**

"Wait, what?! You prefer the dark meat? Oh, hell no! Bartender, keep the White Russians comin' sugar ... " **— Paula Deen**

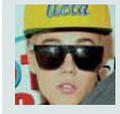
Frankie Muniz ALL IMAGES GETTY

Frightened Muniz suffers another mini-stroke

At 27 years old, Frankie Muniz isn't having the best time, health-wise. "Almost a year to the day, I experienced another mini-stroke," Muniz posted to Twitter. "Hopefully that will be the last. Miserable." A mini-stroke consists of tiny lapses in blood flow to the brain.

Last year he related to Good Morning America how frightening the experience can be: "I couldn't say any words," he said. "I thought I was saying them. My fiancée was looking at me as if I was speaking a foreign language."

Twitter



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Secret of human existence: I totally think I'm the worst, just for different reasons than you do

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One for under the tree, and another one for me

'Tis the season to save on style. Self-shopping becoming less of a secret shame as fashionistas embrace this optimal time to buy their beauty booty

Getting up early on Black Friday for a little shopping? Doing your part on Small Business Saturday and Cyber Monday, too? It's all in the name of gift-giving — or at least the guise of it.

It seems a lot of consumers are using these sales and retail events to treat themselves to a little something new.

As a group, self-shoppers are growing, says Marshal Cohen, chief analyst of The NPD Group, Inc., a consumer insight company. He puts the number at 20 per cent, up from five per cent in the early 2000s.

"I started tracking people shopping for themselves about 10 years ago. I was at a Black Friday in a Macy's in a suburban location in Long Island," he recalls. "This woman has one arm filled with a few things, maybe a dress and a few sweaters, and another with 12 items."

Guess which hand had the future presents for her two sisters and a friend?

It's a similar scene in Loft stores already this year, says Lori Leslie-Robbins, director of client experience for the retailer. "For us, the telltale sign that someone is shopping for themselves is that our fitting rooms stay busy for the holidays. She's trying clothes on, and you don't need to do that for a gift."

Leslie-Robbins overheard this past weekend a conversation between a sales associate and customer in the dressing room that went something like this: The shopper was in the dressing room choosing between a dress and a tuxedo-jacket-and-denim-jeans combo, and was taking seriously this choice of what to wear to a co-worker's at-home holiday party. When the associate asked if she'd also considered a hostess gift, the response was, "I'm not there yet."

Because of the deep discounts, shoppers see this as an opportunity to replenish their own wardrobes and homes with less guilt than buying the new pair of jeans, for example, at full price, Cohen says. Those same shoppers might not feel that way about a gift for someone else.

He says especially the early-bird holiday shoppers are looking for the sales for themselves, while the transactions made closer to Christmas are more likely to be bona fide gifts. He can also tell by what you're buying: If it's electronics or footwear, it's probably for you; fragrance is a go-to gift item, with 20 per cent of annual sales happening in the five days before Christmas, according to NPD.

Rachel DiCarlo is a fan of the one-for-me, one-for-you theory.

Jewellery and scarves, perfectly good gifts for others, are also the items she tends to buy for herself. Last year, she couldn't resist the initial necklaces she was buying for so many others. "I was getting the Ls, the Js, and I thought, 'I should buy an R.'"

She is the vice-president of public relations at American Eagle Outfitters and, in her office, everyone tends to dress similarly. So, she says with a laugh, it makes sense to get for herself the shirt or accessory she is getting for the members in her team — although, everyone gets a different colour.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

We're certain Santa would encourage doing something nice for yourself this yuletide. ISTOCK

You deserve a good deal

Many of the self-purchases Loft's Leslie-Robbins sees in stores are those that solve problems or have a focused end use — this tends to alleviate that pang of guilt, she says.

- A woman needs to buy herself the items no one else will buy her, right? muses Robin White, global press director of beauty brand Philosophy. There's also "the stuff you need" and "the stuff you enjoy buying."
- She takes pleasure, for example, in a new tube of eye cream — it really makes her day, she says, but it's not quite what she'd want to unwrap Christmas morning. That makes it the perfect self-purchase.

Canadian street style

Spotted in: Vancouver

Name: Nikki

Age: 24

Occupation: Sales associate

What she's wearing
Jacket from Aritzia, vintage leather vest from Nouvelle Nouvelle, T-shirt from Cheap Monday, jeans and bag from American Apparel, shoes from Converse and sunglasses from Stella McCartney.

Her inspiration
"This is my Saturday outfit ... running errands."

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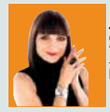

JEANNE SPACE
Jeanne Beker
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Xmas shopping in Kensington Mkt + went nuts at Model Citizen, Augusta St. Discovered jewellery designer Kimberly Dale!

Bundled up to brave the cold. I feel like a walking ad for @TheHudsonsBayCo ! #proudlycanadian

Soothe your winter skin with this make-it-yourself mask

Green with envy over the dewy profile of your pals? Add some moisture with a mask. ISTOCK

A little flakey in the facial region? Improve your complexion from the comfort of your own kitchen

TINA CHADHA
Metro World News

Step away from the work email. The holidays are you time, meaning all you should be doing is stuffing your face, sprawling out to a Scandal binge-fest and perhaps pampering yourself with an at-home beauty treatment. We like this simple recipe to combat dry winter skin from renowned facialist Joanna Vargas (her customers include Michelle Williams and Sofia Coppola). The best part: You most likely have these ingredients in your kitchen — meaning you can achieve glowing in your pajamas, without leaving Olivia Pope's side. Because that is what holidays are about.

"Yogurt and honey are awesome ingredients for a reparative mask because the yogurt reduces inflammation in the skin while honey hydrates," says Vargas of the mixture. "It's an easy solution to soothe and improve skin throughout the cold weather season."

Hydrating mask recipe

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup yogurt
- 1/2 avocado
- 1/4 honey

Directions: Combine all ingredients together in a small bowl. Apply with a sea sponge.

Love the way you style. Rihanna makes salon-ready locks look good

Leave it to Rihanna — who always manages to push boundaries and look cool (have you seen the video for Pour it Up?) — to cause the interwebs to blow up over a hairdo.

At the 2013 American Music Awards on Sunday, the pop star (who took home the Best Soul/ R & B Female Artist award along with the ceremony's first-ever Icon Award) sported a doobie wrap with her sexy two-piece Jean Paul Gaultier ensemble.

The style, which looks like a perfectly chic updo, caused a commotion since it's how many African-American women throw their hair up on the way to the salon when they're going in for an actual hair do. It's the equivalent of accepting an award with your hair still in rollers or a shower cap. But somehow Ri Ri magically made the style look like something a princess would wear to a gala. Those gorgeous pearl pins helped. It reminded us of when J.Lo first flaunted her baby hairs. We're just interested to see if this common urban style will make its way to the masses. METRO

Rihanna. GETTY IMAGES

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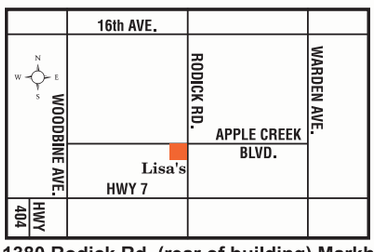

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The great girlfriend gifting dilemma

A recent Match.com survey found most Canadians believe you should only give someone a holiday gift after dating for one to two months and you should spend between $25 and $50.

The survey also found younger Canadians are more likely to rush into gift-giving than older Canadians — singles between 18 to 34 years old wait only one to two months before picking out presents while singles over 65 wait at least six!

Match.com Canadian relationship insider Kimberly Moffit offers these tips:

METRO/ALL PHOTOS ISTOCK

Stage one: dating for less than one month? Spend between $25 and $50.

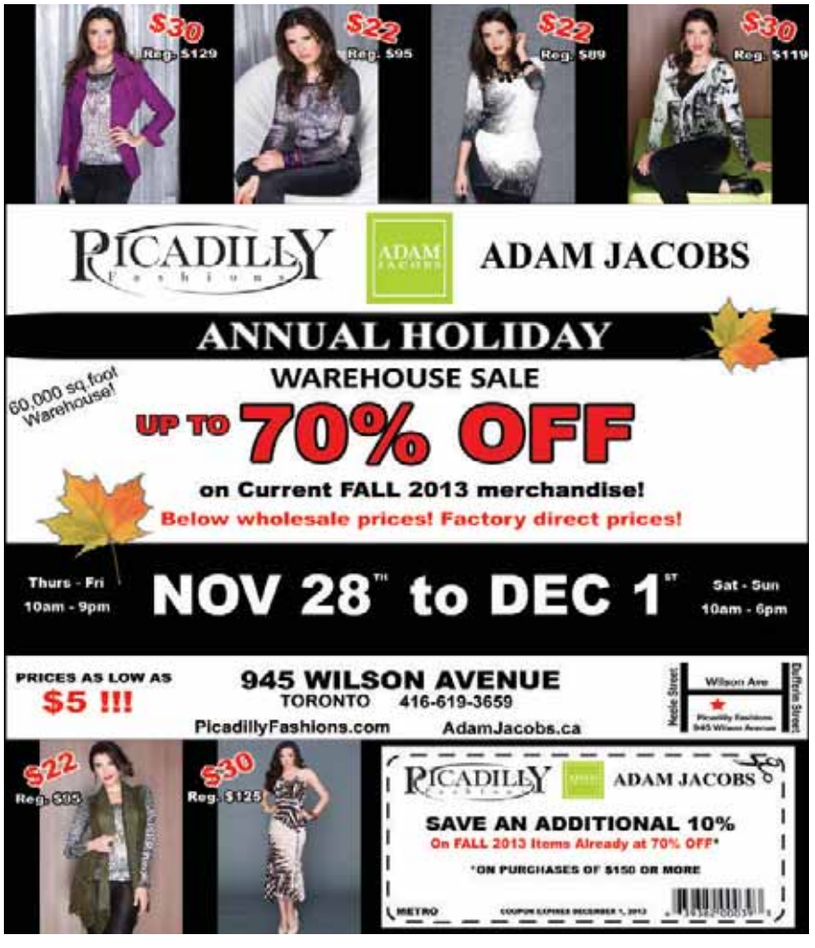
Aromatherapy candles

Stage two: dating for one to six months? Spend between $50 and $75

A small bottle of her favourite perfume

Stage three: dating for six months to over a year? Spend $75 to $100 — at least!

A day at the spa



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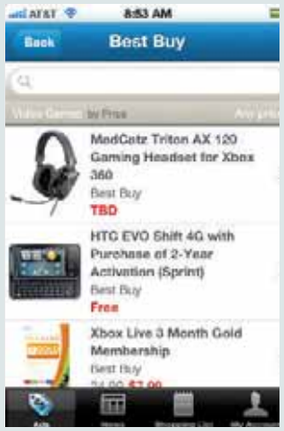
Want some tech support for that Black Friday shopping spree? We have a few apps to help you navigate those deals — or find a better one.

MATT PRIGGE
Metro World News in New York

4 Smart shopping apps

BFAds



For: iOS
Price: Free
Many shopping apps have sections focused exclusively on Black Friday. BFAds, as the acronym may suggest, is all about Black Friday. It rounds up the deals by store, keeps you abreast of news and allows you to compile a shopping list. Where some apps may dig up better deals while you're already out and about, BFAds allows you to make a game plan before you're stuck in traffic.

Shopular

For: iOS and Android
Price: Free
Once upon a time we were terrified of Big Brother one day knowing where we are. Now we find it convenient. When you walk into a store, Shopular buzzes you, telling you about the deals and feeding your coupons to the very place in which you presently stand. And it can be used the old-fashioned way, which is to say that you can search by store before you go. (See also: Zoomingo.)

BuyVia

For: iOS
Price: Free
BuyVia starts with what you'd like to buy. Then it lets you pick the store. Then it finds you deals. It's a bit limited, handling mostly the big box chains. But if you'd like to keep things simple, with a guide who looks like Bill Gates, it will serve you well, helping to find the best price amid the gruesome rivalries waged between the major stores.

PoachIt

For: iOS
Price: Free
New to the shopping app wasteland, PoachIt allows you to search by scanning the barcode of an item to see if there's a better deal elsewhere. Or you can simply search by product. Looking for the best plasma TV? Just type that in and it will rank the best deals.

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michael hill
michaelhill.ca

Usher in the holiday baking season with rich Lemon Walnut Bars

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 cup large-flake rolled oats
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup dark brown sugar
- 1/2 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- 1/2 cup ground walnuts
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 300 ml can condensed milk (about 1 1/4 cups)
- 1/2 cup lemon juice, freshly squeezed (about 2 lemons)

You Will Need

- (9- x 9-inch) pan buttered and lined with parchment paper

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.

2. In a small saucepan over low heat, melt the butter (or melt in the microwave for about 30 seconds on high).

3. In a large bowl, combine the oats, flour, sugar, coconut, ground walnuts and baking powder. Pour in the melted butter and mix with a spatula or large spoon until the butter is evenly distributed. Press half the oat mixture into the prepared pan firmly and evenly.

4. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the condensed milk and lemon juice until fully combined and slightly thickened. Pour the lemon mixture over the base. Use the back of a spoon or a small offset spatula to spread the filling evenly across the base. Sprinkle the remaining half of the oat mixture over the filling.

5. Bake in the preheated oven for 22 to 25 minutes or until the top is a golden brown.

6. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely in the pan.

7. Run a small knife along the two edges of the pan that do not have parchment handles. Carefully remove the slabs from the pan and cut into approximately 2- x 2-inch bars. Make sure to use at least a 10-inch knife to avoid cutting and dragging the knife across the bars.

This recipe makes 16 bars. ALL PHOTOS JANIS NICOLAY

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Cookbook of the Week

Get to sifting

Before it was a book filled with 100 recipes, Butter Baked Goods was (and still is) a tiny bakery in Vancouver. Opened by the author of the book, Rosie Daykin, it is known as the home of the very best gourmet marshmallow in North America.

In Butter Baked Goods, Daykin shares homemade treats and childhood favourites through instructions that are easy to follow.

Among the delicacies in the book are: Butter's Chocolate Cake, Red Velvet Cupcakes, Peanut Butter Balls and more. METRO

Classic tropical combination: Pineapple Coconut Scones

"Every day at Butter we make a different scone," writes Rosie Daykin of her Vancouver bakery in her book Butter Baked Goods. "There is no set schedule, so regular customers call us in the morning to check what we have on tap that day. This flavour never seems to disappoint..."

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F.

2. In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, quickly mix the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt on low speed to blend. Add butter cubes and mix until large crumbs form. Add the coconut and mix again to distribute. Add the buttermilk, crushed pineapple and juice and mix until almost combined.

3. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and roll out to about 1-inch thick. Use the circular cutter to cut out 10 circles and place them on the prepared cookie sheet about 1 1/2 inches apart.

4. In a bowl, whisk together the egg and water to make an egg wash. Use a pastry brush to gently coat the top of each scone with the wash. Sprinkle with a little sanding sugar.

5. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. A wooden skewer inserted into the center should come out clean.

6. Remove from oven and allow scones to cool on the cookie sheets. Then split open and spread with butter and jam!

This recipe makes 10 scones.

Ingredients

- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/3 cups sugar
- 3 tbsp baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups butter, chilled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 cups unsweetened shredded coconut
- 3/4 cup buttermilk
- 1 14-oz can crushed pineapple with juice

Finishing

- 1 large egg
- 2 tbsp cold water
- Coarse sanding sugar

You Will Need

- Cookie sheet, 3 1/2-inch circular cutter

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The deals are just delightful

What happens when Black Friday becomes the new Boxing Day? More deals? Maybe. More crowds? Perhaps. More drama? Is there ever too much? Metro has your guide to survive not only this Friday, but also the online shopping spree that is Cyber Monday.

THROWAWAY THURSDAY

Gather your gently used items and donate them in support of Clothesline® Canadian Diabetes Association* on Black Friday, November 29. The first 200 people to donate get a $10 gift card.** Pick up your donation kit at Guest Services.**

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*100% of net proceeds directly support the Canadian Diabetes Association. **For offer terms and conditions, please visit Guest Services or CanadianBlackFriday.ca.

Expert offers no-bull tactics to

Run, bargain hunter, run. If you are brave enough to participate in a crush of crazy shoppers this Friday, you need some tips

MAJA LUNDAGER
Metro World News in New York

If you look up Black Friday on YouTube, you're bound to find a lot of videos with terrible titles like Black Friday Fights, Black Friday Disasters or Black Friday 2012 Madness.

But the horrifying stigma of this day doesn't seem to scare the thousands of brave shoppers who voluntarily run with the big box store crowd, fighting for killer deals on last year's food processor.

As with all other extreme sports, you need to prepare for Black Friday shopping. We went to the best: Mark Hellmann Regouby.

Is Regouby an experienced Black Friday shopper? Not really. But he'll do you one better.

He's the founder of the travel company Running of the Bulls, Inc., which puts tourists up close and personal with the animals at the annual event in Pamplona, Spain.

Here's his advice for braving big crowds.

Before you go in

"We tell them … watch the Bull Run first so they can see how it works and understand the flow of the people and the bulls and make their strategy from overviewed conditions," he says.

This is where the aforementioned YouTube search for Black Friday videos will come in handy. But the preparation doesn't stop here. If you were planning to hit the bottle to take the edge off of Black Friday shopping, you'd better think twice.

"The No. 1 rule is to arrive sober," Regouby says. "No. 2 is to get a good night's sleep. No. 3 is to have 360-degree awareness. Always try to be aware of who is in front, behind and beside you. Really get a sense of being in the place."

Surviving in the heat of battle

"The best runners always say you stake out your territory," says Regouby. "You use your arms and don't let anybody get too much in your way. Swing your arms and keep in your elbows to make sure you've got your own space that you need in order to run without tripping."

This sounds extreme, but seriously, do you want that food processor or not?

If you go down

There have only been 15 deaths since the beginning of the Bull Run in Pamplona in 1910, but broken wrists and bloodied chins are the norm. According to Regouby,

Braving Black Friday crowds this year? You need survival skills! ISTOCK

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scoring best Black Friday deals

there are more falls and injuries because of humans tripping over each other than because of the bulls. We can, with some certainty, say the same about Black Friday, except that the National Retail Federation in the U.S. — the homeland of Black Friday — has only reported one trampling death: In 2008 a Walmart employee was crushed in a stampede. So what do you do if you go down?

"The most important rule of all is if you go down, stay down. The bulls are actually talented at stepping over obstacles and as long as you cover your head and stay down and don't move, they can plan to step over you."

We can only hope the same counts for the herds at Best Buy and Target. Actually, we're going to say that the people waiting in the cold to buy stuff at discount prices are NOT talented at stepping over obstacles, so we advise just trying to roll to safety!

When you succeed

Regouby says that a run like the one in Pamplona is for people who want to be in touch with their own mortality and live their lives to the fullest.

"I have [run with the bulls] four times and it's still pretty incredible," he says.

"You arrive in this huge arena and the sun hits your face and the air is fresh again, and you can't believe you are alive."

That sounds a bit like waking up way too early on Black Friday and shortly afterward hauling bags of discounted goods to the parking lot, realizing all of your arms and legs are intact, right?

This year Black Friday. Next? Pamplona. ISTOCK

Canadian context

While Black Friday is a relatively new shopping event in Canada, the day's quick rise in popularity among Canadians is having an impact on Canuck retailers' holiday sales strategy. Consulting firm Accenture recently released the results of a survey into the habits of Canadians when it comes to Black Friday. Here are some findings:

- **Hungry for the best deals.** Almost two thirds of Canadians surveyed plan to shop at U.S. retailers, online or in-store, on Black Friday and throughout the holiday season.
- **Boxing Day.** Is still believed by many (44 per cent) to offer the best deals of the season in Canada, Canadians feel retailers in Canada are not doing enough to compete with U.S. stores on Black Friday.
- **Go south.** When Canadians surveyed were asked when they believed they would see the best deals of the holiday season (either in Canada or the U.S.), Black Friday in the U.S. was cited by almost half (42 per cent), while less than a quarter (23 per cent) said the best deals were to be had on Black Friday in Canada.
- **Bust down the door.** More than a quarter of Canadians (27 per cent) would shop in a store on Black Friday because they want to take advantage of special door buster deals.

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Buyer be where — the best deals are on Black Friday

Shopping strategy. Only head out into the fray if you've got a game plan says expert shopper

EMILY LAURENCE
Metro World News in New York

The day after American Thanksgiving is the busiest shopping day of the year.

While it's a paid day off from work for some of our southern neighbours, there are Canadians who are also willing to drag themselves out of bed at the crack of dawn on a work day for a steal of a deal.

But is it really worth it?

"I don't think so," says Michelle Madhok, shopping expert and founder of SheFinds.com. "You can get a lot of the same deals online, and there are also some deals you can only get online."

And you don't have to wait until Friday, or even Cyber Monday, to start scoring the best deals.

Madhok suggests using deal alert sites that tell you when the price drops on an item you want.

Prices are dropping now and will continue to do so the rest of the year up until after Christmas.

But if you do decide to brave the crowds, Madhok has some helpful tips to make it truly worth it.

Her first one is no surprise: Get your electronics first.

"The biggest Black Friday deals are on electronics, and getting 70 per cent off a TV is better than getting 70 per cent off, say, gloves," she says.

But buyer beware: Madhok says many retailers make lower quality products specifically for Black Friday.

To outsmart these sneaky stores, look up the model number to ensure what you're buying is the same model you want and not a knockoff.

Second, have a plan. Go to different websites to find store coupons and deals.

"It will help you make a game plan," Madhok says. "Then, head to the stores in advance so you know the layout."

Once you're in the store, use apps to scan your items to make sure you're getting the lowest price. If not, many stores match the price you find elsewhere.

Lastly, Madhok advises keeping your receipts, taking photos of them and uploading them to SkyDrive.com or Evernote.com so you can keep them on file.

"Ask for a price adjustment if you see the price on an item go down. Many stores will honour that," she says.

Most importantly, remember to keep your cool while you're out bargain hunting.

First Black Friday stop? The electronics section! ISTOCK

Quoted

"The biggest Black Friday deals are on electronics and getting 70 per cent off a TV is better than getting 70 per cent off, say, gloves."

Shopping expert Michelle Madhok on Black Friday strategy

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Five tips to reduce shopping stress

Plan of attack. Do your research, set a budget, shop online and if you have to brave the mall — bring your best pal

MAE BOWRING
life@metronews.ca

If stores that look like they've barfed Christmas and crowded malls scare you, you're not alone. Fear not, weary shopper. Checking everyone off your 'nice' list — and enjoying it — is not impossible, says image consultant Christie Ressel, a shopping and fashion expert. Follow her top five tips for stress-free holiday shopping and you'll be singing Let It Snow all the way home.

Be a sleuth

The element of surprise can be lost during the holidays as shoppers try to get something — anything! — wrapped and under the tree. Instead of asking what someone wants and buying it, do a little bit of detective work, advises Ressel.

"We're so quick to get on with our lives that we miss the obvious," she says.

Pay close attention to what they say about their favourite hobby, TV show or website.

They're probably dropping hints. Ressel once found a great gift idea for her husband by flipping through one of his magazines.

Have a plan

Once you have a gift list and you've checked it twice, set a strict budget for yourself, suggests Ressel.

You may have to be more creative or spend time on DIY gifts, but the stress you won't feel when January's credit card bill arrives will be worth the effort.

Overspending is one of the biggest holiday buzz kills, Ressel warns.

"It will make you crabby for the season and it's meant to be enjoyed."

Having a detailed gift list and budget will also make you laser-focused when you're out shopping. No more wandering around aimlessly!

Before you leave the house

With Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals getting better every year, Canadians are enjoying the ease of buying gifts from the comfort of their own home.

This is where the real fun comes in, says Ressel.

"I love online shopping. I'm not a fan of bumping shoulders with everybody."

It's easy to compare prices for electronics online and if you're really clever, you can call the store ahead of time to make sure the item is in stock.

While Ressel believes Canadians can purchase a lot of their gifts online, she advises against buying trendy clothing online unless you know the exact size, quality and designer you're dealing with.

Make it jolly

It's time to brave the mall with the rest of your list, but there's no reason you have to do it alone. Grab a friend and arrive early to beat the crowds.

The checkout lines won't seem as long if you have someone to chat with and be sure to break up the marathon by grabbing lunch or a coffee.

Want to make sure your gifts stay a secret?

Ressel suggests stashing them at a friend's house, and then having a wrapping party over a glass of eggnog closer to Christmas. The only ones who will be miffed on Christmas morning will be the ones who tried to snoop, jokes Ressel.

"Hopefully they weren't wanting what someone else got."

Be ready to return

Your holiday shopping plan was well executed and you have every reason to pat yourself on the back. If a loved one does need to return a gift, however, it's wise to be prepared, says Ressel.

Keep receipts handy by placing them in a bright-coloured folder in the kitchen or by the front door. That way you won't have to wrack your brain trying to remember if it's in your wallet or accidentally went out with the recycling.

If no one says anything about their gift by the end of January, it's safe to throw out the receipts, advises Ressel.

Before you head out into the Christmas shopping craziness, make a list — and check it twice. ISTOCK

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I won't spend a cent until I see a sale sign

Shop when it drops. This year's holiday customers are wary of shelling out the cash without a compromise

During the recession, retailers used sales to lure cash-strapped consumers into stores. The strategy has bred a group of deal junkies who won't shop unless they see a clearance sign. DAVID GOLDMAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

This holiday season, shoppers may not spend their green unless they see more red.

Despite signs that the economy is improving, big store chains don't expect consumers to have much holiday shopping cheer unless they see bold, red signs that offer huge discounts.

As a result, shoppers are seeing big sales events earlier and more often than in previous holiday seasons.

Retailers are trying to lure shoppers like Marissa Anwar, who has been doing more bargain hunting compared with last year.

The operations consultant, who lives in Toronto and New York City, said the economy "hasn't been great" and she's lost clients.

As a result, she cut her shopping budget to $2,800 from last year's $4,000.

"I was a former 'spend-aholic,'" said Anwar, 29. "Now, I want to make sure I have the money before I spend it."

It's a problem that retailers know all too well.

Since the recession began in late 2007, stores have had to offer financially-strapped customers ever bigger price cuts just to get them into stores. But those discounts eat away at profits.

So far, Wal-Mart, Target and Kohl's are among more than two dozen major chains that lowered their profit outlooks for either the quarter or the year.

A big reason is the expectation that they'll have to offer huge discounts in order to get shoppers to spend.

Earlier discounting and lowered profit outlooks from retailers are becoming more frequent even though there are indications that the economy is recovering.

The job market is making strides. The housing market is starting to come back. And the stock market keeps hitting new highs.

All that would ordinarily lead Americans to spend more.

But so far, those improvements haven't been enough to shore up consumer confidence.

In fact, Americans' confidence in the economy is at its lowest level since April this year.

"Stores know that they are well into a fight," said Ken Perkins, president of the research firm RetailMetrics.

"The vast majority of consumers are distressed."

Retailers say economic worries continue to weigh on shoppers heading into the holiday shopping season.

"We continue to see anxiety regarding the economy and the ability to stay within household budgets, particularly among lower- and middle-income consumers," said Kathee Tesija, executive vice-president of merchandising for Target, which trimmed its annual profit outlook last Thursday.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Changes in store

There are already signs that retailers are aggressively discounting.

- Wal-Mart, for instance, last Friday started matching or beating the prices that certain competitors like Best Buy are advertising for some toys and electronics for the day after Thanksgiving — known as Black Friday. Best Buy also plans to match rivals' prices, even after customers have purchased items.
- And Target, better known for its whimsical advertising, is touting its prices in holiday TV ads for the first time in at least a decade.

Mall mania

"Stores know that they are well into a fight. The vast majority of consumers are distressed."

Ken Perkins
President of RetailMetrics

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Bluenotes' OUTLET

Pack your bags! The big travel deals land on Cyber Monday

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The travel industry is offering promotions large and small for Cyber Monday. Some companies are participating for the first time, while others are embracing the online holiday sale in a bigger way than in the past.

American Express Travel is launching its first-ever Cyber Monday promotion, with substantial hotel discounts and deals throughout the U.S. and Canada for Jan. 13-31.

The promotions will be bookable at amextravel.com beginning Monday (Dec. 2) at 12:01 a.m. and will last 72 hours.

Liberty Travel has participated in Cyber Monday before, but the volume of deals and their promotion is bigger this year and offers deeper savings.

Liberty has assembled 99 deals with up to 65 per cent off, bookable Black Friday through Cyber Monday (Nov. 29-Dec. 2), featuring resorts in the Caribbean and Mexico along with cruises and escorted tours.

Liberty is also giving a credit of up to $100 on all new bookings made in Liberty Travel stores Friday-Monday (Nov. 29-Dec. 2).

Get a Black Friday code at LibertyTravel.com, available as of 12 a.m. Friday (Nov. 29), then present it to an agent to take $50, $75 or $100 off (depending on how much you spend) on trips worth $2,500 or more.

Priceline.com is doing a one-day sale beginning at 12:01 a.m. Monday (Dec. 2) promising "50 per cent off flights for travel before Dec. 18" on select flights from unsold inventory.

Spokeswoman Leslie Cafferty says "there are a lot of options for those who are there first," advising deal-seekers to "start searching early."

Big savings are shipping out on Cyber Monday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

George Hobica of AirfareWatchdog.com says "the hipper newer" airlines like Virgin America and JetBlue have participated in CyberMonday airfare sales in the past. But he says they often simply bring out their "usual Tuesday or Wednesday promo code sales wrapped up in a CyberMonday package."

For cruise-lovers, Royal Caribbean will offer onboard credits of $50, $100 and $200 per stateroom (depending on length of cruise) as well as reduced deposits for departures Jan. 1 or later. The offer applies to bookings with paid deposits made Dec. 2-4 at royalcaribbean.com or via 800-Royal-Caribbean, and it excludes sailings on Quantum of the Seas.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Financial tips

Don't say bah-humbug to a budget

Worried about overspending this year on holiday shopping?

Here are some tips from Raymond Chun, senior vice president of TD Canada Trust, and Eileen Chadnick, certified coach and principal of Big Cheese Coaching, to help minimize stress and avoid overindulging.

Create a plan and start budgeting now
"Start by reviewing last year's debit and credit card statements to get a realistic idea of spending habits and, based on current finances, set a firm budget for this year's holiday spending, and break down the budget into specific categories, from gifts and decor to entertainment and travel, to make it easier to manage," said Chun. "Once your budget is set, divide that figure by the number of weeks until the holidays to determine how much to save each week to avoid post-holiday debt."

Shop early and track spending
"Shopping earlier in the season provides time to comparison shop and find the best deals online, and it lets you take advantage of seasonal sales and promotions that pop up, ultimately saving you money," said Chun. "You can also look at redeeming credit card rewards to buy gifts in order to save even more."

Watch for potential budget breakers and stay focused
"The holiday season can be hectic, and when we're tired and stressed our impulse control is compromised, which can lead to poor decision-making and indulgences we may later regret," said Chadnick. "To avoid post-holiday remorse, it's important to set boundaries in advance — for example, make sticking to your original gift-giving list easier by writing it out. With a little advance planning, you can manage the additional temptations that come with the holiday rush."

METRO

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After shopping, it's a wrap!

Odd-shaped gift

Booze, lotions and bubble bath are all popular gifts, but they're also round. Instead of trying to wrap it into a hot mess, try this creative solution.

What you need:
- Two pieces of coloured tissue
- Clear plastic bag
- Three pieces of coloured ribbon

How to do it:
Place two pieces of the same coloured tissue on top of two others, creating a T-shape. Lay the gift down in the middle of the tissue. Fold the bottom of the tissue upwards and then the sides over, creating a cone around the gift. Place the cone in a plastic bag and tie the ribbon just above the top of the gift. Curl the ribbon with scissors and adjust the excess paper "poof" on top. Ribbon curling tip: Look to see how the ribbon curls naturally, and drag the scissor blade down the same side to get a tight curl effect.

With these simple tricks, you'll be smiling instead of swearing at wrapping time. ISTOCK

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Not all gifts come in the shape of a box that's easy to wrap. Let's face it, even boxes are hard. Ever wonder how Aunt Doris gets her corners so crisp? Not sure how to wrap an awkward-shaped present? Elana White, owner of Toronto gift shop Outer Layer, shares four novel ways to wrap yours up this holiday season.

MAE BOWRING
Metro News Canada

Traditional box

Board games, shoeboxes — you're laughing because you think this wrapping job will be a cinch. But it's not. Where people go wrong, White says, is having too much wrapping paper.

What you need:
- Holiday wrapping paper
- Scissors
- Clear tape

How to do it:
After taping the paper together length-wise, tackle the sides. The wrapping paper should only come halfway up the gift width-wise, White explains. Ready for the secret trick? Fold the top of the paper all the way down, enforcing a crease on either side. That should make it easier to tuck in the sides, followed by the bottom. From there you need one small piece of tape to hold it together. Repeat on the other side.

Bag it

Have a bunch of small items that will fit into a gift bag? Bags are great but people tend to go overboard with tissue paper trying to make it look pretty, says White.

What you need:
- One festive bag
- Four pieces of coloured tissue, two different colours
- Coloured ribbon

How to do it:
Put gift inside the bag. Make a T-shape with the two colours of tissue and put the brighter coloured tissue on top. Pinch the middle of the tissue and give it a shake upside down. It will create a nice V-shaped "poof" that will fill up one side of the bag. Repeat and place the second "poof" on the other side of the bag. The trick, White says, is doing more with less. "We always train new people on how to do the poof." Tie bag handles shut with ribbon and gently curl it so that the ribbon cascades down the side of the bag.

Basket

If your gift has a theme that's too pretty to hide, a basket is another option.

What you need:
- A basket
- Newspaper
- Colourful shredded paper
- Roll of clear cellophane
- Ribbon

How to do it:
Fill the bottom of the basket with newspaper and place the shredded paper on top. This will prevent the items from falling into the basket and out of sight. Place each item on top of the shredded paper at an angle, starting from the back to the front. Cover the basket in cellophane and tie it together with ribbon toward the back of the basket. Cut excess cellophane away and gently curl ribbon.

GARRISON POINT

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Making a stunning first impression: Designers dream up fantastic foyers

Selling points. As one agent notes, a condo lobby is as important as the fitness centre or the appliance package

CONDO TRENDS
Duncan McAllister
life@metronews.ca

There's nothing more impressive than a fabulous foyer. Your condo lobby is the first thing guests see about your home, so it should have impact.

Savvy Toronto builders are investing large sums into making sure the front entrance makes a grand statement and conveys the majesty of the entire building, much like the lobby at Studio 2 by Aspen Ridge, created by the Mike Niven Interior Design team.

Linda Mitchell Young is a senior agent with Baker Real Estate, one of Toronto's top firms. From a sales perspective, she sees the condo lobby as being equally important to the fitness centre or the appliance package.

"We will always make sure that there is a rendering of the interior of the building and a few of the amenities, but definitely the lobby is also one that is important. People like to see the initial entrance, the initial feel of what's going to be the front door to their home.

"There's a lot of attention put on them by the developer and a lot of money put into them to make it quite a first impression that would be a great statement to people."

A rendering of the Harbour Plaza lobby, designed by Cecconi Simone. CONTRIBUTED

And nothing makes an impression like the grand lobby of the Ocean Club condo, the work of Tomas Pearce Interior Design Consulting. The waterfront residence is a joint project between Graywood Developments and Beaverhall Homes.

Anna Simone is one half of the creative team of Cecconi Simone Interior Design. The pair has taken the city by storm, and is one of the most sought-after design teams currently on the scene. Among their designs is the magnificent lobby of the Harbour Plaza by Menkes.

Simone maintains that the foyer is the point where the exterior of the building meets the interior.

"The lobby area is an extension of what the architecture is and we bring that indoors. So there's always this seamless approach between where the interiors leave off and the exterior starts," she says."

Simone says they don't necessarily gravitate towards the latest trends, and that design is about responding to a specific need in order to create works that are truly memorable.

"We try to design something that is timeless, and timeless is to us anything that has more substance, and therefore we look to create an environment that has a soul and a DNA so when you're in it you don't forget it."

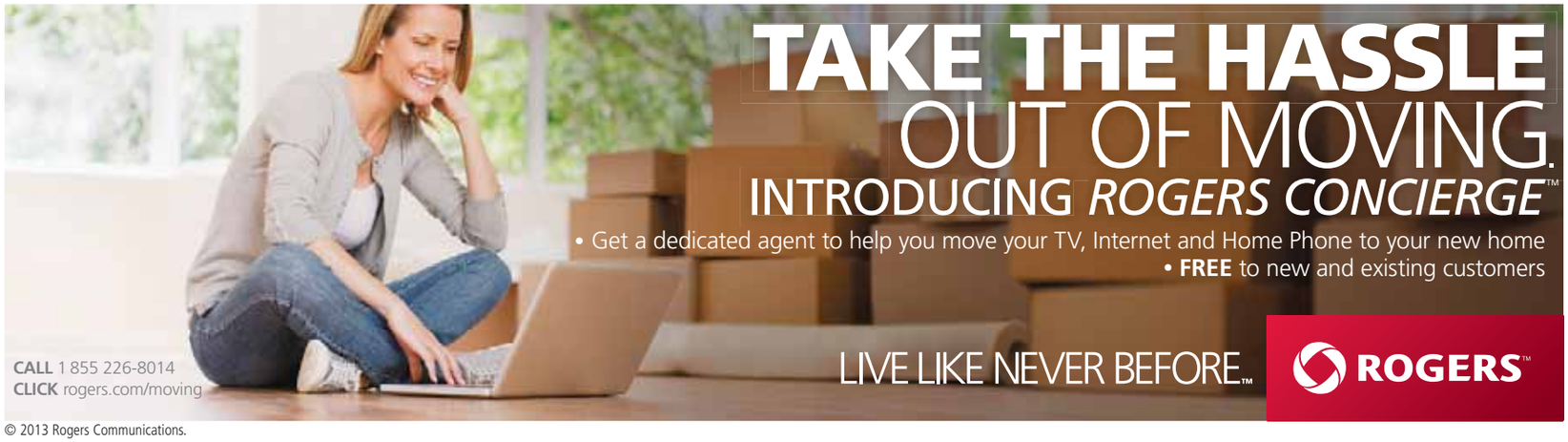
Making an impact

"People like to see the initial entrance, the initial feel of what's going to be the front door to their home."

Linda Mitchell Young, senior agent with Baker Real Estate

The lobby of Studio 2 was designed Mike Niven Interior Design. CONTRIBUTED

The lobby of the Ocean Club condo, designed by Tomas Pearce. CONTRIBUTED



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Planning

The importance of Section 37

BRYAN TUCKEY
President and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) can be found at twitter.com/bildgta, facebook.com/bildgta, and bildblogs.ca.

As mentioned in some of my earlier columns, the Ontario government is currently working to improve land-use planning through an 80-day public consultation process.

One important aspect under review is the often-misunderstood Section 37 of the Planning Act, which permits municipalities to pass bylaws to authorize increases in height and/or density beyond what is otherwise permitted in return for facilities, services or matters that benefit the community such as parks, school playgrounds or community centres. The selection of community benefits is made on the basis of local needs, the nature of the development application, any implementation guidelines or plans adopted by council and the strategic objectives and policies of the Official Plan. These vary with each proposed development.

One of the issues surrounding Section 37 today is that the base density found in zoning bylaws across the GTA is badly outdated. This means that neighbourhoods suitable for high-density development are still zoned for low-density housing, leading to higher Section 37 fees for new-home purchasers.

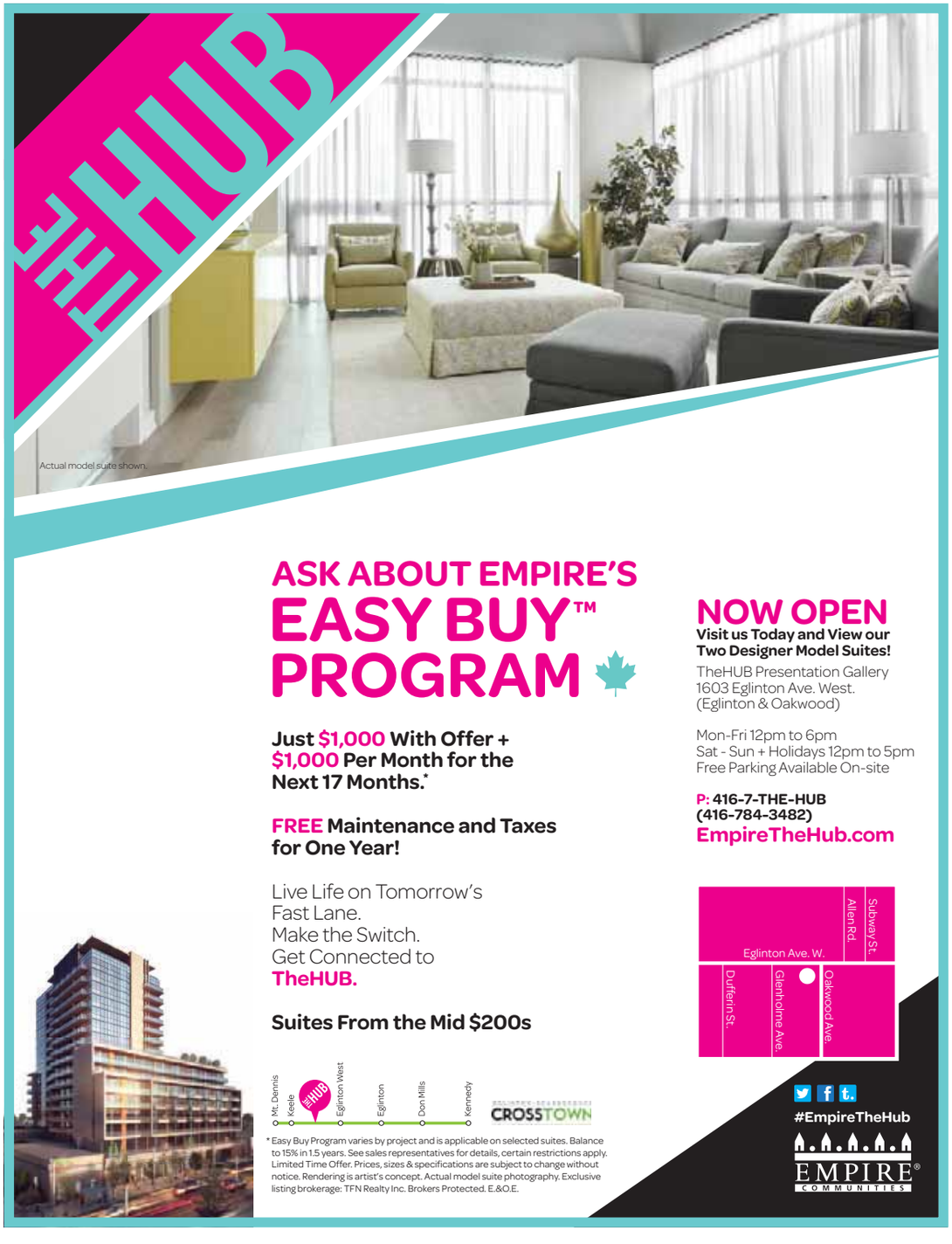
Is it fair for new-condo buyers to pay more for these homes because of outdated zoning bylaws that don't conform to the Official Plan? What about the Provincial Growth Plan, which places a great emphasis on intensification in the GTA?

If a project is in conformity with the Provincial Growth Plan and Official Plan policies and objectives, due consideration should be made when negotiating Section 37 fees to ensure that our industry can continue to build homes people can afford.

Much like development charges, Section 37 fees can be put toward transit or other types of capital facilities. But are these payments being used for their intended purposes?

Accountability from the municipalities is lacking, as the community should be provided assurance that the funds collected will be spent on the intended community improvement projects.

It's worthwhile noting that in priority neighbourhoods, a development can be considered a community benefit as it offers improvement through neighbourhood revitalization. Waiving Section 37 charges in priority neighbourhoods will help our industry build more affordable homes in areas that need it most.



Hario's retro home coffee roaster, available at greenbeanery.ca, is one of the more stylish options for home roasting. It's guaranteed to send the coffee fanatic on your gift list into a full-on foodie swoon. CONTRIBUTED

Tech gifts for the holidays

DIY. If you want to make a big impression on your giftees this year, surprise them with one of these innovative home items

I Want That

- For more unique and cutting-edge ideas for the home, tune in to I Want That on Sundays at 6 p.m. on DIY Network Canada.

For that person on your list who seems to have everything, consider some futuristic and entertaining high-tech gear for the home. Perfect for surviving the winter months and staving off cabin fever, even the biggest electronics junkie will want to show off these toys to friends and family.

Programmable lights
With a few specially designed light bulbs and a Wi-Fi network, programmable lighting goes far beyond just turning lights on and off. Customize the brightness and colour of each bulb using a smartphone, and set the perfect mood for a romantic dinner or a big New Year's bash. The lights can even be programmed to slowly brighten in the morning to imitate the sunrise for a more natural alternative to an irritating alarm clock.

Home coffee roaster
For the coffee connoisseur, a roaster is an affordable and easy way to customize the entire coffee experience right in the home. Roasting only takes about eight to 12 minutes and allows drinkers to experiment with different roasts. Ground coffee stales in a matter of minutes, so grind beans as needed for the freshest cup of joe.

3D printers
Yes, 3D printers are making their way into homes. It's still early days for the technology, and the printers certainly aren't cheap, but they're definitely one of the coolest tools available for those on the cutting edge. Perfect for designers or the tech-savvy hobbyist, 3D printers are becoming more accessible with downloadable templates that allow anyone to print impressive designs. Far from becoming mainstream, they may just be the ideal gift for the person who has everything.

An exterior view of Perspective 2. CONTRIBUTED

Get some Perspective

Meet the condo

- **What.** Perspective 2 Condominiums
- **Location.** Eglinton Avenue West and Scarlett Road
- **Builder.** Pianosi Development Corporation
- **Architect.** Turner Fleischer Architects Inc.
- **Designer.** Bryon Patton and Associates
- **Sizes.** From 636 to 1,230 square feet
- **Pricing.** $279,900 to over $1 million
- **Building.** 12-storey mid-rise condo
- **Status.** Under construction
- **Sales Centre.** 2893 Bloor St. W.
- **Phone.** 416-242-3500
- **Website.** perspectivecondos.com

The project overview

Pianosi announces the second phase of their latest development in Etobicoke. Overlooking the south Humber River and the valley, Perspective 2 offers a town and country environment. Featuring 10-foot ceilings, European kitchens and an Energy Star appliance package.

Building amenities

Club Perspective features an indoor pool with access to an adjacent outdoor patio, an outdoor amenity with barbecues, an exercise room with treadmills, Lifecycles and a weight station, an ultimate golf simulator, a fully integrated home theatre, and a billiards room, media room and guest suite.

Location and transit

The condo towers are located in Etobicoke in Toronto's west end. The Eglinton West and Scarlett Road TTC bus routes run past the building and commuters are only a short distance from the Weston GO rail station and Highway 401.

In the neighbourhood

Perspective is surrounded by green spaces including James Gardens parklands, Scarlett Woods and the Lambton Golf Course. Nearby, a recreational trail system extends for miles, stretching down to Lake Ontario for strolling, running or biking.

Legal Matters

Resolving water pressure woes

I'm set to purchase a condo next week and when I inspected the property, I noticed that the water pressure in the kitchen sink was low. I have asked the seller to address this issue but haven't heard anything back. I do not want to close if this is still a problem. What should I do?

LEGAL MATTERS
Jeffrey Cowan
home@metronews.ca

Typically, the water pressure is not an issue that a condo owner can control. This issue is a function of the building and its management. Inquiries should be made to see if this is a building-wide problem or just localized to the particular tap you're concerned about. If the problem is just your new kitchen sink, then a plumber should check to see if there is a blockage or some other issue restricting the water flow.

Bigger problem

If it's a building-wide issue then you'll need to take this up with the management company and the board of directors.

If it's a building-wide issue then you'll need to take this up with the management company and the board of directors. Low water pressure is not something that you can hold up a sale for, but perhaps you might want your lawyer to request a holdback of some funds in order to pay for any plumbing work that needs to be done after closing.

Follow Jeff Cowan on Twitter @Cowan_Law or on the website at cowanlaw.ca

Tartan it up for the holidays

Plaid is one of the most popular patterns during the festive season — the clean lines look great in both modern and traditional interiors, and they're a perfect way to add variety to a room with solid colours (so long as you remember to never mix plaids together). From tabletop items to wallpapers, there's a wide array of accessories that bring a touch of the old clan to your home.

DESIGN CENTRE
Karl Lohnes
home@metronews.ca

Add some old-school style to your work commute. Plaid Lunch Box and Thermal Carafe, $40 each, crateandbarrel.com.

Subtle grey plaid adds modern sophistication to walls. Audrey Charcoal Wallpaper, $85 per roll, grahambrown.ca.

Stay warm during those cold nights. Nordic Plaid Duvet Cover Set, $75, simons.ca.

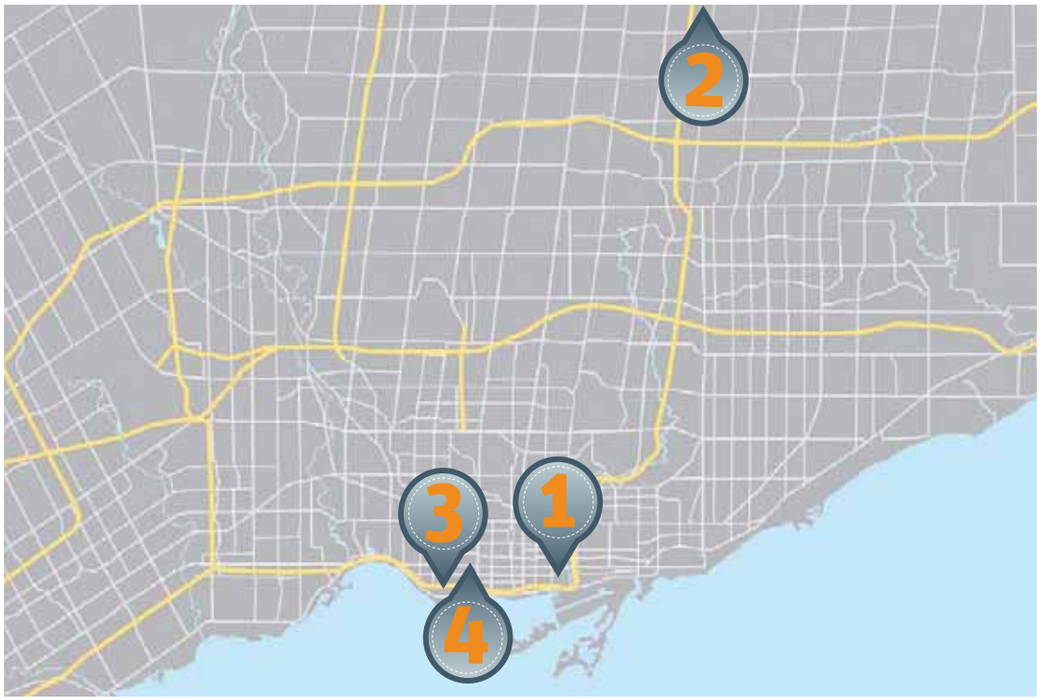
Punchy colours modernize the season's favorite pattern. Lord & Taylor Buffalo Plaid Duvet Cover, $69-89, thebay.com.

Scotch and soda never went down so easy. PC Tartan Glasses, four for $9, Real Canadian Superstore.

Drive in style while keeping your hands toasty. Plaid Steering Wheel Cover, $15, canadiantire.ca.

Add bright colours underfoot. Modern Plaid 5x8 foot Wool Rug, $450, cb2.com

What's hot on the condo market in the GTA



DUNCAN MCALLISTER

1. West Don Lands

1. New Release: Canary District condo townhomes in the West Don Lands. Incentive pricing on a limited number of one-bedroom units. Visit the sales centre at 9 Mill St.

CALL 416-603-7576 OR VISIT CANARYDISTRICT.COM.

2. Markham

Open House: Friday Harbour resort towns and condos, wine and cheese event. Located in the conference room at the Delta Markham Hotel, 50 East Valhalla Dr., Nov. 28 from 5 to 8 p.m.

CALL 647-351-0991 OR VISIT FRIDAYHARBOURRESORT.COM.

3. Downtown

One of a Kind: Accessorize your condo at the 2013 Christmas show and sale. Nov. 28 to Dec. 8. Visit the Direct Energy Centre at Exhibition Place, 100 Princes' Blvd.

CALL 416-960-3680 OR VISIT ONEOFAKINDSHOW.COM.

4. Downtown

4. Open House: DNA condos at King West. One bedroom, one bathroom suite. Head over to 1 Shaw St., Nov. 28 from 2 to 4 p.m.

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Concussions

Over 200 ex-NHLers join lawsuit: Lawyers

The original concussion lawsuit against the NHL included 10 former players, and that number has already grown.

More than 200 players have joined, according to lawyers Steve Silverman and Mel Owens, who are at the forefront of the suit.

Owens, an NFL linebacker-turned-disability lawyer said in a phone interview Wednesday that "hundreds" of ex-NHL players are going to become part of the suit, which was filed in U.S. federal court in Washington on Monday.

"These are 10 players, but there's hundreds of guys that, they're in the lawsuit," said Owens, who works for NBO Law in Beverly Hills, Calif. "They just haven't been named yet. They're going to be there."

A list of the 200-plus players was not made available when requested.

Sportsnet.ca was the first to report that more than 200 players joined the effort, which began with 10 players including former Maple Leafs Gary Leeman and Rick Vaive.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Bills in Toronto

"We can't complain about it. We just got to go out and try to handle business."

Buffalo receiver Stevie Johnson, wondering who had the bright idea to have the Bills "host" the warm-weather Atlanta Falcons inside Toronto's Rogers Centre on Sunday.

Ravens defensive tackle Brandon Williams sacks quarterback Ben Roethlisberger during the Steelers' 19-16 win on Oct. 20 in Pittsburgh. The rivals meet again in prime time on Thursday night in a game with playoff implications. JUSTIN K. ALLER/GETTY IMAGES

No rest for the rivalry

NFL. Big game in Baltimore on U.S. holiday caps short work week for Steelers and Ravens

The last time the Baltimore Ravens played on U.S. Thanksgiving, coach John Harbaugh gathered the family together for a game against brother Jim and the San Francisco 49ers.

Two years later, Harbaugh and the Ravens will spend the holiday with their most bitter rival.

It doesn't matter that Baltimore (5-6) and the Pittsburgh Steelers (5-6) both have losing records. Both teams have plenty of motivation, because Thursday night's game has playoff ramifications. Plus, these AFC North foes almost always engage in a hard-hitting, trash-talking, closely played affair.

"It's always a cool week when you go against these guys," Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco said. "It's been a good game for the last handful of years, and it's always a challenge getting ready on a short week. But they have the same issues. It should be a lot of fun."

Since Harbaugh took over the Ravens in 2008, Baltimore has faced Pittsburgh 13 times, including twice in the playoffs. Nine of those games were decided by three points, including the Steelers' 19-16 win last month.

"It's just an intense rivalry," Pittsburgh wide receiver Antonio Brown said. "Great defence is played. I think everyone understands the urgency of the game. It's just iron on iron. It's always a tough battle, and it always comes to the fourth quarter and to the end of the game."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Blazing hot in black and yellow

"I just think we're all continually evolving, and thankfully we're evolving in the right direction."

Pittsburgh head coach Mike Tomlin, whose Steelers have bounced back with a 5-2 run that includes three consecutive wins after opening the season with four straight losses.

Fast facts

- The Ravens are 4-1 at home this season compared to 1-5 on the road.
- Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs has more sacks (16 1/2) against Pittsburgh's Ben Roethlisberger than any other quarterback.
- Steelers rookie running back Le'Veon Bell burned the Ravens for a career-high 93 yards the last time the teams played.

Bills ownership angling

Working in stealth in T.O.

CATHAL KELLY
Special to Metro

There was a wonderful symmetry to the way the Jon Bon Jovi-as-Buffalo-Bills-owner story leaked and then faded away earlier this week.

It blew up in a U.S. outlet, giving plausible deniability to the Toronto-based principals if the NFL gets huffy about loose lips.

The timing was perfect — just before the Bills show up on Sunday, when they're top of mind in the city.

The brevity of it — a one-day cycle. Pop your head out, make your intentions (fuzzily) clear, and then recede into the shadows where the real work is being done.

It was capped by the retractable denial, issued by a guy we'll never hear from again. This was no accident. This is how the high-end corporate-communications game works. **GO TO METRONEWS.CA/VOICES FOR MORE FROM CATHAL KELLY ON THE BILLS' FUTURE IN TORONTO.**

4 SPORTS

Real Madrid's Pepe, left, challenges Galatasaray's Tue Na Bangna Bruma for the ball in Madrid, Spain, on Wednesday. GONZALO ARROYO MORENO/GETTY IMAGES

Real Madrid kicks in door of KO stages

Champions League.
Man U, PSG also book spots among final 16

Nine-time winner Real Madrid qualified for the Champions League's last 16 alongside Manchester United and Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday, while Juventus kept alive its chances of reaching the knockout stages.

Madrid, which only needed a draw at home to Galatasaray to clinch top spot in Group B, won 4-1 with goals from Gareth Bale, Alvaro Arbeloa, Angel Di Maria and Isco.

Juventus claimed its first win of the campaign and moved into second place in the same group with a 3-1 victory over Copenhagen as Arturo Vidal scored a hat trick. The Bianconeri kept their destiny in their own hands and a draw away to Galatasaray on the final match day will be enough for the Italian champions to advance.

United qualified from Group A with an emphatic 5-0 win at Bayer Leverkusen and PSG secured top spot in Group C with a 2-1 win against Olympiakos.

On a night when all the big clubs won, defending champion Bayern Munich set a new Champions League record by winning its 10th successive game in the competition with a 3-1 win at CSKA Moscow. It equaled Barcelona's 2002-03 record with nine in a row three weeks ago.

Bayern and Manchester City, who had already qualified, will be vying for Group D supremacy in two weeks in Germany. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

World Cup

Guay the man to beat in Lake Louise

Canada's Erik Guay was the fastest in training for the season-opening men's World Cup downhill.

The Mont-Tremblant, Que., native posted a time of one minute 50 seconds in the first of three training runs for Saturday's downhill in Lake Louise, Alta. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Alpine skiing

U.S. stacks its speed team

Lindsey Vonn may be injured but the U.S. is loaded with depth in downhill and super-G. Julia Mancuso, Stacey Cook, Leanne Smith and Laurenne Ross — all of whom made the podium at least once last season — are the skiers the Americans could be counting on for medals in Russia if Vonn, the reigning Olympic downhill champion, can't compete after hurting her surgically repaired right knee again. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Olympic hockey

Roster deadline moved to Jan. 7

The roster deadline for the 2014 Sochi Olympics has been pushed back to Jan. 7, the International Ice Hockey Federation announced.

Originally, national federations had until Dec. 31 to submit 25-man rosters for the tournament, which begins Feb. 12. Russia and other European countries were lobbying for a later date and got their wish.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Soccer

FIFA upholds Ukraine sanctions

FIFA has rejected Ukraine's appeal against sanctions imposed after fans racially abused their own black player and made Nazi salutes at a World Cup qualifying match.

Arena Lviv is barred from staging qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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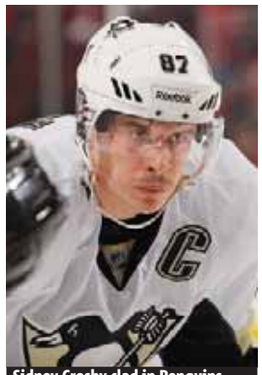
Concussion lawsuit: Crosby on the fence

Interview. Sid says juggling the NHL and the excitement over Sochi is 'pretty easy'

Sidney Crosby is well aware of the concussion lawsuit some former players brought against the NHL, but it sounds like hockey's most famous concussion victim is neutral about it. Here he talks about that, the Olympics and his teammates ahead of Wednesday night's visit from the Leafs.


Sidney Crosby clad in Penguins uniform. ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

Have you heard of the lawsuit former NHLers launched against the league?

"It's not uncommon to see suits like that. Concussions, everyone is learning more and more about them. The fact we're finding out more probably has something to do with it."

How do you balance the NHL season with the excitement of the Olympics?

"It's pretty easy. I think you know your play, your game, what you need to do is important leading into the Olympics. It's not any different than any other Olympic athlete. You want to be at your best when the Olympics start."

Do you talk a lot about it with Evgeni Malkin?

"We didn't last time. We haven't really talked that much about it this time. I'm sure with it being in Russia, he's got things to do and is a little bit busier too, like I was last time when it was in Canada. It's evident that it's in Russia from his schedule."

Who's got the most pressure in the Olympics, Canada or Russia?

"I'd say it's even. There's always pressure playing for Canada, no matter where it is. I think Russia definitely has high expectations. And they're passionate hockey fans."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Leafs vs. Penguins

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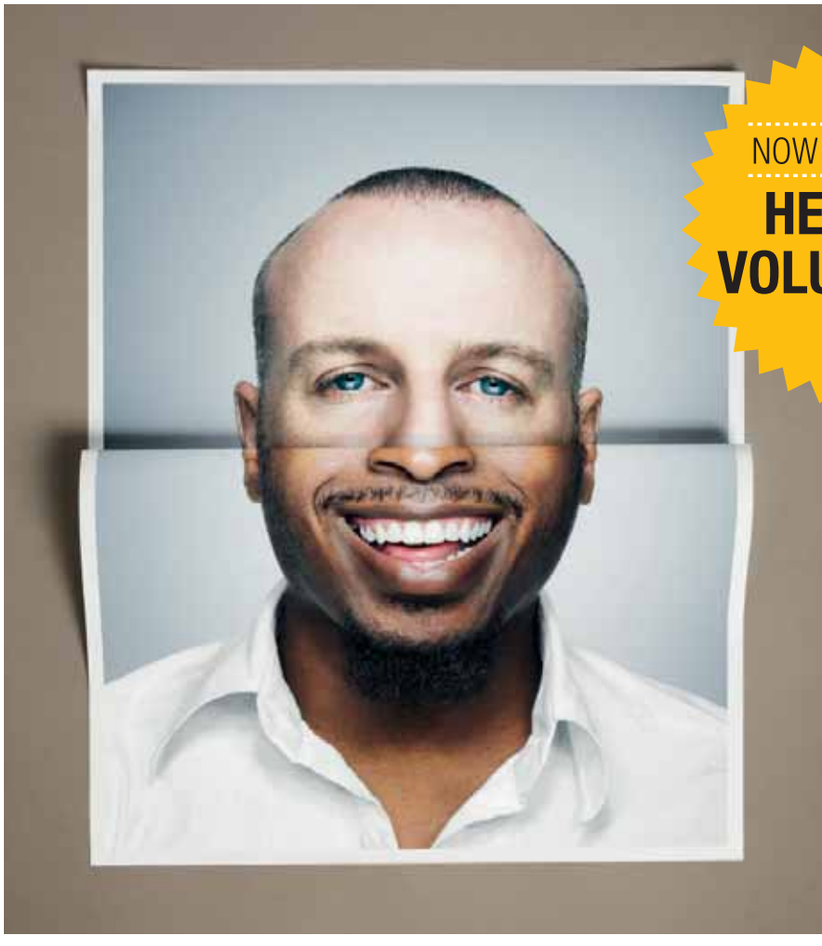

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NBA players toe line as frenemies

Flipping the switch.
Pro ballers insist competitive nature doesn't take back seat in games against pals

The Raptors' Kyle Lowry, left, greets former teammate Alan Anderson, now of the Nets, before their game Tuesday at the Air Canada Centre.
VINCE TALOTTA/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Friends? Or foes?

In the brotherhood that is the NBA, where players have known each other since they were in their early teens, where they share common experiences, common backgrounds and often common friends, that is the most delicate of balancing acts.

Are they friends? Or are they foes?

There are times when the perception is the former and if indeed perception is reality it's hard for fans not to get the wrong message.

The pre-game hugging.

The post-game catching up.

The apparently friendly conversations that go on during stoppages in play.

They can irk fans longing for tough, intense competition, fans that don't want to see familiarity between opponents, fans who think they feel far more "us against them" than the players might.

It may be not be reality — competitive juices start flowing once the game starts — but even a hint that players on different teams are too friendly can strike at the very core of game.

The object is to beat the other guy, not be his buddy.

Raptors coach Dwane Casey, a basketball lifer and one of the more personable men in the game, has seen enough over his three decades in the sport to be a bit turned off by the love-ins he sees.

He watches players seconds before a game starts hanging out, sometimes laughing and always seemingly enjoying themselves and it cuts him.

Deeply.

"I don't believe in fraternizing," he said this week. "I guess I'm old school but you see them (opposing players) in the summer time.

"That's what the summers are for, to make sure you spend time with your friends. But they're the enemy right now. They're trying to take your livelihood away from you."

To a man, players insist there is nothing untoward about the pre-game schmoozing or the night-before-the-game dinners or the post-game hang-out sessions.

"In practice and games we still try to take each other's heads off," said Raptors guard D.J. Augustin, a five-year NBA veteran. "But once you're off the court, you're still a human being." TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Blurred line

In a game earlier this week, DeMarcus Cousins of the Sacramento Kings pulled back teammate Isaiah Thomas when Thomas went to shake hands with Chris Paul of the Los Angeles Clippers after a particularly contentious game. It may have been a rare and minor moment but it stuck in Paul's craw.

- "He's young, man," Paul told a television interviewer of Cousins. "He don't know no better. He needs some guidance."
- Raptors coach Dwane Casey has a differing view: "I've got a lot of friends throughout the league, I've been there a long time and know a lot of people. I don't like to fraternize and I don't like our players fraternizing and doing whatever else before the game."

NHL

EASTERN CONFERENCE

ATLANTIC DIVISION

	GP	W	L	OL	GF	GA	Pt
Boston	24	16	6	2	68	46	34
Tampa Bay	24	15	8	1	72	61	31
Toronto	24	14	9	1	66	60	29
Detroit	25	11	7	7	63	70	29
Montreal	24	13	9	2	64	51	28
Ottawa	24	9	11	4	68	77	22
Florida	25	7	13	5	56	81	19
Buffalo	25	5	19	1	44	79	11

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

	GP	W	L	OL	GF	GA	Pt
Pittsburgh	25	15	9	1	72	58	31
Washington	24	12	10	2	72	68	26
NY Rangers	24	12	12	0	48	59	24
New Jersey	24	9	10	5	50	58	23
Carolina	24	9	10	5	49	67	23
Philadelphia	23	10	11	2	50	56	22
Columbus	24	9	12	3	62	71	21
NY Islanders	24	8	13	3	68	82	19

WESTERN CONFERENCE

CENTRAL DIVISION

	GP	W	L	OL	GF	GA	Pt
Chicago	25	17	4	4	92	71	38
St. Louis	23	17	3	3	82	50	37
Colorado	22	17	5	0	69	45	34
Minnesota	25	15	6	4	64	58	34
Dallas	23	12	9	2	67	68	26
Nashville	24	12	10	2	56	69	26
Winnipeg	26	11	11	4	69	76	26

PACIFIC DIVISION

	GP	W	L	OL	GF	GA	Pt
Anaheim	27	17	7	3	83	71	37
San Jose	23	15	3	5	79	52	35
Los Angeles	25	16	6	3	67	53	35
Phoenix	24	14	6	4	80	78	32
Vancouver	26	12	9	5	67	68	29
Calgary	23	8	11	4	64	84	20
Edmonton	25	7	16	2	65	89	16

Note: 2 points for a win, 1 point for overtime loss.

Wednesday's results
Nashville at Columbus
Winnipeg at NY Islanders
Ottawa at Washington
Montreal at Buffalo
Carolina at New Jersey
NY Rangers at Florida
Philadelphia at Tampa Bay
Toronto at Pittsburgh
Boston at Detroit
Phoenix at Minnesota
St. Louis at Colorado
Chicago at Calgary
Los Angeles at San Jose
Tuesday's result
Dallas 6 Anaheim 3
Thursday's games — All times Eastern
Vancouver at Ottawa, 7:30 p.m.
Edmonton at Nashville, 8 p.m.
Friday's games
Winnipeg at Philadelphia, 11:30 a.m.
NY Rangers at Boston, 1 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Tampa Bay, 4 p.m.
Detroit at NY Islanders, 4 p.m.
St. Louis at San Jose, 4 p.m.
Calgary at Anaheim, 4 p.m.
Montreal at Washington, 5 p.m.
Colorado at Minnesota, 6 p.m.
Edmonton at Columbus, 7 p.m.
New Jersey at Carolina, 7 p.m.
Toronto at Buffalo, 7:30 p.m.
Chicago at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.

SCORING LEADERS

	G	A	Pt
Crosby, Pit	13	18	31
Steen, StL	19	10	29
Getzlaf, Ana	13	15	28
Zetterberg, Det	10	18	28
Ovechkin, Wash	20	7	27
Tavares, NYI	10	17	27
Malkin, Pit	4	23	27
Perry, Ana	13	13	26
Kane, Chi	13	13	26
H. Sedin, Van	7	18	25
Little, Win	12	12	24
Toews, Chi	12	12	24
St. Louis, TBL	10	14	24
Karlsson, Ott	7	17	24
Benn, Dal	7	17	24
Backstrom, Wash	5	19	24
Thornton, SJ	2	22	24
Stamkos, TBL	14	9	23
Seguin, Dal	12	11	23
Datsyuk, Det	12	11	23
Marleau, SJ	11	12	23
Couture, SJ	8	15	23
Kopitar, LA	7	16	23
Ryan, Ott	11	11	22
Parise, Min	11	11	22
Kunitz, Pit	11	11	22

Wednesday's games not included

NFL

WEEK 12
Thursday's games
All times Eastern
Green Bay at Detroit, 12:30 p.m.
Oakland at Dallas, 4:30 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Baltimore, 8:30 p.m.
Sunday's games
Jacksonville at Cleveland, 1 p.m.
New England at Houston, 1 p.m.
Arizona at Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
Miami at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
Tennessee at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
Chicago at Minnesota, 1 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Carolina, 1 p.m.
Atlanta at Buffalo, 4:05 p.m.
St. Louis at San Francisco, 4:05 p.m.
Cincinnati at San Diego, 4:25 p.m.
Denver at Kansas City, 4:25 p.m.
N.Y. Giants at Washington, 8:30 p.m.
Monday's game
New Orleans at Seattle, 8:40 p.m.

NBA

Wednesday's results
Indiana at Charlotte
Philadelphia at Orlando
Memphis at Boston
L.A. Lakers at Brooklyn
Miami at Cleveland
Chicago at Detroit
Atlanta at Houston
Washington at Milwaukee
San Antonio at Oklahoma City
Denver at Minnesota
Golden State at Dallas
Portland at Phoenix
New York at L.A. Clippers
Tuesday's results
Washington 116 L.A. Lakers 111
Brooklyn 102 Toronto 100
Orlando 109 Atlanta 92
Golden State 102 New Orleans 101

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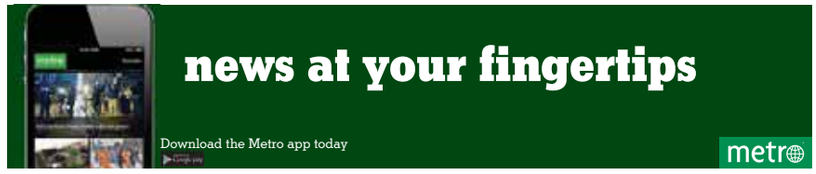
Saturday, Dec. 7
Kansas City vs. Salt Lake, 4 p.m., EST



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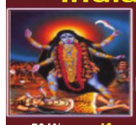

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Horoscopes

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
You will be able to charm the birds out of the trees today but why waste your talents on wildlife when you can focus instead on getting your way on the work front? Employers won't be able to say "no".

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
Not everyone will agree with what you do over the next 24 hours but do you care? No, you don't! No one has the power to make life difficult for you. So, if it feels good, do it.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
Let someone you trust know that your happy -go-lucky act is just that. Once your share your problem, it won't be as bad when various options have been pointed out to you.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
With love planet Venus moving through the relationship area of your chart, you can't afford to be shy with affairs of the heart. If there is someone you fancy, let them know. Chances are they feel the same way about you.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
It's good to dream and some dreams will never come true and it's time you faced up to that fact. Never mind, there should be another great dream coming along soon.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
You will be rather impatient today and that may be no bad thing, especially if people you work with are dragging their feet just to annoy you. Maybe you should threaten to carry on without them.

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
You have the happy knack of knowing what loved ones want and will go out of your way to get it for them over the next 24 hours. Don't forget your own needs though.

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Mercury in your sign links with both Venus and Jupiter today, so good news is coming your way. Whatever it happens to be, don't keep it to yourself.

♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Make sure you know all the facts before reaching a decision about a money or business issue. Remember too that just because someone makes big noise does not mean they know what they are talking about.

♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Keep things light and don't let the cares of the world get to you. Venus in your sign makes it easy to see past negativity and make sense of what to others appears senseless. Life has meaning, and it is joy.

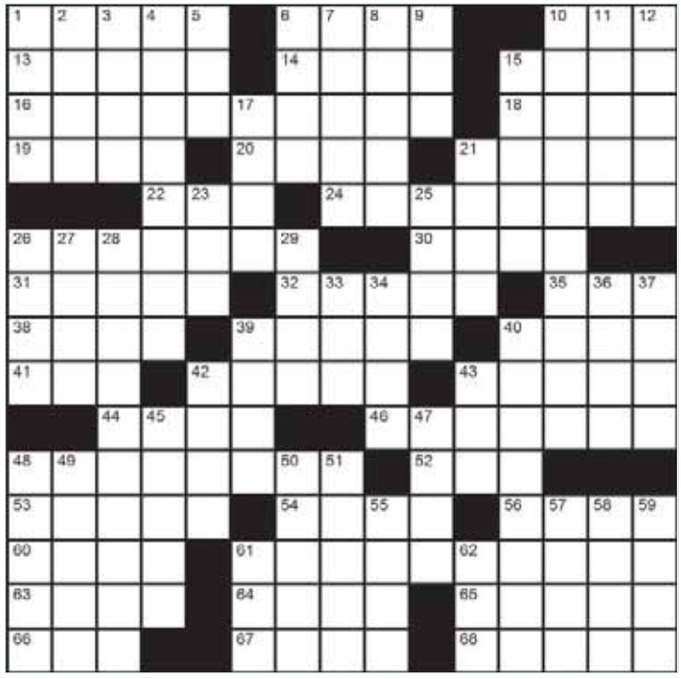
♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
You can persuade almost anyone to do almost anything for you today but you don't seem happy with that "almost". You may be good with words but don't push too hard. Someone will always be immune to your charms.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
This is an excellent time to travel, ideally with friends. The things you discuss and the things you see will make you glad to be alive in this time and place. SALLY BROMPTON

Crossword: Canada Across and Down

See today's answers at metronews.ca/answers.

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



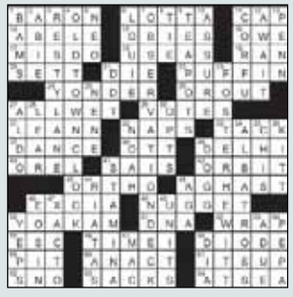
Across

1. Glisten
6. Federal force, commonly
10. Juice: French
13. Camera company
14. Margarine
15. Faxed
16. Canadian fashion designer: 2 wds.
18. Cracker spread
19. Tugboat's sound
20. Poetic nights
21. Mr. Schwarzenegger, to fans
22. Spotlight lover
24. Toronto's __ Expressway
26. Saintly
30. Border
31. __ Carta
32. Some beans
35. Li'l physician
38. Balmy
39. Casual material
40. The Dalai __
41. "..._ _ quit!" (Worker's ultimatum)
42. House fields
43. Job-giver
44. Abound
46. Canada __ for the Arts (Administrator of the annual honours at #28-Down)
48. Rihanna hit
52. Carrot, e.g.
53. "Hang Ten" Canadian singer
54. Govern
56. Sicilian volcano
60. Actress, Sharon __
61. As per #28-Down... Fiction book winner: The __ by Eleanor Catton, set in New Zealand
63. Deviate
64. Tunestress Tori
65. Capital of Belarus
66. Antiquity
67. Secret-passer's sound effect
68. Writer W.B. with Reshmi __"
28. _ _ _. __ (Prestigious honour for Canadian writers, trendy-style ...see 2013 winners at #4-Down and #61-Across)
29. Ball of yarn
33. Caravansary
34. Filing abbr.
36. Sacred Buddhist peak
37. Director Mr. Reiner
39. "Curses!"
40. Victoria's Secret apparel
42. Rock's Kings of __
43. Shade
45. Actress Ms. Procter
47. Baking need
48. Search into
49. Model
50. Ringo's instruments
51. Wrestlers of Japan
55. Itemize
57. Frank Sinatra daughter
58. Cozy retreat
59. Requests
61. Swimming segment
62. Ms. Poehler

Down

1. Jazz singing style
2. Religious 'ring'
3. Data
4. As per #28-Down... Poetry book winner: Katherena Vermette for __ __ Love Songs, set in the Winnipeg neighbourhood of the title
5. Compass dir.
6. Red __ Tea
7. Held on tightly
8. High IQ society
9. Disc in a 1990s fad game
10. The Maid of Orleans, b.1412 - d.1431: 2 mots
11. Take apart laces
12. Drive
15. Parsley portion
17. Ashton's ex
21. Tots up
23. Menu words
25. Printing quantity
26. G.I.'s weapon need
27. "CBC News Now

Yesterday's Crossword



Sudoku

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved.

	6			7		1		8
5				9	4			
			1					4
			6	8	1	3	9	
				3				
	5	1	7	4	9			
9					7			
			2	6				9
6		7		5			8	

Yesterday's Sudoku

4	1	9	3	8	5	7	2	6
3	6	5	7	2	1	4	9	8
8	7	2	9	6	4	3	1	5
7	2	6	4	5	8	1	3	9
5	3	8	2	1	9	6	7	4
9	4	1	6	3	7	5	8	2
6	8	4	1	9	3	2	5	7
1	5	7	8	4	2	9	6	3
2	9	3	5	7	6	8	4	1

Today
-3°/-7°
Flurries
Friday
-3°/-7°
Partly cloudy
Your #1 weather forecast now available in HD.
Check your local listings for details.
The Weather Network HD
TWN incorporates MSC data

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